



# ***Nathan the Wise***

*by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing*

## ***Translated from the German Nathan der Weise***

*by Stephanie Clennell and Robert Philip*



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*Frontispiece* Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. (Mansell Collection)

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G. E. Lessing



# Introduction

## Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, 1729–81

### *The young scholar*

Lessing was born in 1729 in the small town of Kamenz in the Protestant state of Saxony. His family background was Lutheran and academic. His father, Johann Gottfried Lessing, was chief pastor of the main church in Kamenz. Johann Lessing had studied at the University of Wittenberg and kept up his academic interest by writing and translating theological works, but he had a large family and was very poor. He applied successfully to the Elector of Saxony for a scholarship for his eldest son, Gotthold Ephraim, to attend the prestigious electoral school (Fürstenschule) of St Afra in Meissen.

St Afra had high academic standards. Life there was austere, with an emphasis on religious observance. The young Lessing thrived on the rigorous classical training, and impressed his teachers with his intellect and independence of mind.

When Lessing left the school in 1746 he became a student of Protestant theology at the University of Leipzig, as his parents wished. At first he devoted himself to study, as he had done at school, but then in Leipzig ‘a place where one can see the whole world in miniature’ he began to realize that he needed to educate himself for living in society. He wrote in a long letter to his mother: ‘I learned what a difference there was between me and other people. A timid country lad, a clumsy, graceless body, complete ignorance of manners ... I felt a sort of shame that I had never felt before.’<sup>1</sup>

He learned to dance, fence and ride; and he discovered the theatre. At that time a theatre company run by the formidable Karoline Neuber<sup>2</sup> was presenting plays in Leipzig, including translations of classical French plays. Lessing became passionately interested in the theatre. He wrote a play *The Young Scholar* (‘Der junge Gelehrte’) which was successfully performed by the Neuber company in 1748. His lifelong active interest in the theatre had begun, and at the same time led to the first

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<sup>1</sup> 20 January 1749. Vol XVII no.6 in Lachmann-Muncker edn. of Lessing’s *Sämtliche Schriften* (complete writings), 3rd edn. Berlin, Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1886–1924. Letters: vols XVII–XXI.

<sup>2</sup> Karoline Neuber (1697–1760) was well educated and of good family. She escaped from a cruel and tyrannical father by eloping with a young student, whom she married in 1718. Their only recourse was to join a theatrical troupe and some years later Karoline was managing her own company.



disputes with his parents. They were worried, horrified even, by this worldly interest. Indeed to strict Lutherans the theatre was anathema (a point briefly referred to in *Nathan the Wise*). Lessing respected his parents' views, and he remained, in his way, a dutiful son. He did not see his developing independence of thought as a revolt against them, but rather wanted to make them understand his own changing outlook, including his wish to give up the study of theology. This need to come to terms with his own and other people's views on religion lasted all his life, as you will find when you read *Nathan the Wise*.

With his father's reluctant approval Lessing changed to the study of medicine and philology. He did not complete his studies in Leipzig, because he had to make a quick escape. The Neuber theatre company was in debt and disbanded. Lessing had imprudently acted as surety for some of the actors; he was in no position to provide any money, and went secretly to the University of Wittenberg. 'For the first and only time in his life he was guilty of a dishonourable action' said H.B. Garland (1962, p.9).

Lessing enrolled as a medical student in Wittenberg, but fell ill, and gave up his studies after a few months and went to Berlin. He had decided that he would try to live as a writer in Berlin. There would be for him no respectable career as a pastor or university teacher, as his parents had hoped; instead he would face hardship, insecurity and poverty. But he would be independent.

### *The spread of Enlightenment*

In 1748 it was just possible to make a living by writing. Johnson in England, and Diderot in France, are notable examples of this. There was a growing demand for literary works to which publishers responded. In the German states, periodicals, the so-called 'moral weeklies', began to appear in the 1720s, following the example of the English *Tatler*, *Spectator*, and *Guardian*. There were hundreds of these periodicals by the 1760s, although the life-span of each was short (about three years). More specialized periodicals also appeared, such as learned journals (which had appeared in Latin in the seventeenth century) and literary and political periodicals. It was through these that 'the process of the enlightenment as an overall movement began', according to Aner (1929, p.30).

Lessing was well equipped to take part in this movement. He had had a sound academic training and people like him could earn a little money by writing, editorial work, private teaching or translation. Lessing widened his own knowledge of works, especially contemporary ones, in English, French and Spanish, as well as German. He had a talent for publicity. He made the most of speedy and frequent publication, so that his writings and his ideas spread quickly among the enlightened élites in the various German states. From 1751 he was an editor of the Berlin Gazette (the *Berliner privilegierte Zeitung*) and its monthly supplements,



and was cited as an important critic.<sup>3</sup> With like-minded friends in Berlin he was able to carry on a campaign for enlightened ideas. As this stage this meant questioning, analysing and criticizing existing ideas and works. He was relentlessly critical of Professor Johann Christoph Gottsched's<sup>4</sup> attempts to improve German literature, particularly drama, by insisting on close imitation of French classical literature of the seventeenth century. Instead Lessing put forward other models, such as Shakespeare, and introduced new works and ideas to the reading public in Germany. For example, Rousseau's essay the *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* appeared in 1750, and Lessing reviewed this work (and questioned its assumptions) just a few months later, in April 1751.

Lessing was ready to take risks, stir up trouble, and criticize the eminent. As a critic he was intent on raising standards, as someone who '... does not deny the truth in order to flatter, is convinced that a warning about a bad book is a service which one renders to the public, one which is more worthy of an honest man than a servile facility for bartering praise for praise' (*Letters on modern literature, Briefe die neueste Litteratur betreffend*, 1759).

His attacks were specific and the most eminent contemporaries were not spared. '... and Voltaire's *Zaire*? How inferior it is to the *Moor of Venice* (*Othello*) of which it is a poor copy'.<sup>5</sup> Lessing's contacts with Voltaire (Frederick the Great's guest in Berlin from 1750–53) were mainly unfortunate. He had done some translation for Voltaire, notably of his *History of the Crusades*. A friend, Richier de Louvain, Voltaire's secretary, had lent the proofs of Voltaire's *Age of Louis XIV* (*Siècle de Louis XIV*) to Lessing, who carelessly took them with him when he went to Wittenberg in 1751. Voltaire was outraged, suspected a pirating attempt, and complained to Frederick, who did not forget the incident.

Lessing's reason for returning to Wittenberg was to get his Master's degree. He was successful, and returned to Berlin in 1752 to work again for the *Berliner privilegierte Zeitung*.

## Friends and allies

Berlin was now an important centre of serious literary criticism. There was relative freedom of expression (except in writing about politics and

<sup>3</sup> 'A new critic has appeared here whose work you will be able to judge from the enclosed review of *The Messiah* (Klopstock's epic poem). He just seems a little young.' J.J. Sulzer to J.J. Bodmer (in R. Daunicht (1971) *Lessing im Gespräch*, München).

<sup>4</sup> Gottsched (1700–66) *Versuch einer Critischen Dichtkunst für die Deutschen* (Essay on the Art of Poetry for Germans, 1730).

<sup>5</sup> *Letters on modern literature* No.17, 1759.



the State, as Lessing said in a later acid comment).<sup>6</sup> Lessing had a circle of friends among writers, booksellers and publishers. In 1754 he met two men who became his lifelong friends and with whom he worked closely in Berlin. They were Friedrich Nicolai<sup>7</sup> (1733–1811), a writer and bookseller, and Moses Mendelssohn<sup>8</sup> (1729–86), whom he first met as a chess-player. In October 1754 Lessing wrote of Mendelssohn: '[He] is actually a Jew, aged about 20, who, without any education, has a remarkable grasp of languages, mathematics, philosophy and poetry. I expect him to become an honour to his nation, if he is allowed to develop fully, unlike those of his religion who are always driven by a terrible spirit of persecution.'<sup>9</sup>

Moses Mendelssohn was the son of a public scribe in Dessau. He had been taught by a rabbi, and when the rabbi went to Berlin, Moses, at the age of 14, followed him there, determined to educate himself and live as best he could by copying and teaching. As a Jew he had very few rights even in Frederick the Great's Prussia. Jews still had a separate and subordinate legal status. Some few had a special status as protected Jews (*Schutzjuden*). In 1753 Frederick revised the regulations about Jews, but mainly in order to make use of a small number of wealthy Jews as manufacturers and bankers. In 1749 Lessing had already written a play *The Jews* (*Die Juden*, published in 1754) in which he deplored anti-Semitic prejudice, but his friendship with Mendelssohn was his first close contact with a Jew. As Lessing hoped, Mendelssohn's intellect and integrity were recognized and he became an eminent philosopher, who believed that the essential principles of his own religion could be reconciled with modern enlightened secular learning. In *Nathan the Wise* Nathan is such an enlightened Jew, and although the character, Nathan, is not a portrait of Moses Mendelssohn, Mendelssohn probably had a considerable influence on Lessing's conception of the role.

The article *Philosophe* in the *Encyclopédie* (*Texts*, I p.9) speaks of: 'This love of society, which is so essential to the *philosophe*'. Lessing and his friends were like the French *philosophes* in this respect. They had little money, little time for frivolity, but meetings, clubs, long conversations and discussions, and correspondence, were their life-blood.

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<sup>6</sup> Letter from Lessing to Friederich Nicolai, 25 August 1769 in document 45 in *Texts*, I, Frederick the Great, King of Prussia, Letters and Documents, p.63.

<sup>7</sup> See footnote 6.

<sup>8</sup> Moses Mendelssohn was the grandfather of the composer Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy.

<sup>9</sup> To the Göttingen theologian and orientalist Johann David Michaelis. (Lachmann-Muncker, Vol. XVII No.34).



## Achievement and reputation

Lessing already had a considerable reputation as a writer when he was in his twenties. He had published poems, fables, literary criticism, studies in theological history, and five plays: *The Young Scholar*, *Damon, or True Friendship*, *The Old Maid*, *The Jews*, and *The Freethinker*. The plays were all comedies, but all had a moral content. Lessing's ideas about open-mindedness in religion and his criticism of prejudice and intolerance are clearly seen in *The Jews* and *The Freethinker*. In *The Jews* a baron is rescued from robbers by a stranger whom he welcomes to his home as a worthy and cultivated man. The baron, who has anti-Semitic prejudices, thinks that his attackers were Jews, but it turns out that they were his own servants in disguise, and that his rescuer is a noble-minded Jew.

In 1755 Lessing and Moses Mendelssohn collaborated on an essay: *Pope – a Metaphysician!* (*Pope – ein Metaphysiker!*). The Berlin Academy of Sciences had offered a prize for an essay on Pope's proposition in the *Essay on Man* – 'whatever is, is right'. Their joint essay on this subject was scathing about any claim that Pope, as a poet, might have to a grasp of philosophy; but they were not critical of Leibniz, as Voltaire was shortly to be in his poem on the Lisbon disaster (1756) and *Candide* (1759). The Berlin Academy did not favour Leibniz's views. Lessing and Mendelssohn did not enter for the prize, but published their essay anonymously, well aware that they were dealing with a contentious issue of the Enlightenment.

The theory of drama was important too; it was not enough to formulate rules for drama, as Boileau<sup>10</sup> had done in seventeenth-century France, followed by Gottsched in Germany in 1730. The fundamental nature and purpose of drama had to be re-examined. Lessing, like so many of his enlightened contemporaries, had a deep respect for the Ancients. He had himself translated Plautus<sup>11</sup> and studied Aristotle's theory of drama. He shared this interest in drama with Nicolai and Mendelssohn, with both of whom he conducted a correspondence on tragedy, while Lessing's own articles on the drama appeared in a series of publications in the 1750s. The most important work was *Letters on Modern Literature*, which appeared in sections between 1759 and 1760. Diderot had said: 'Everything must be brought to light boldly, without exceptions, and unsparingly' (*Texts*, I, p.9). These three young men practised what Diderot preached. The articles on the theatre condemned adherence to French classical models, and praised Shakespeare and Lessing himself approved of the 'sentimental' comedy appearing in England and

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<sup>10</sup> Boileau (Despreaux) Nicolas (1636–1711), French critic and poet and author of *L'Art poétique* (*The Art of Poetry*, 1674).

<sup>11</sup> Titus Maccius Plautus (c.254–184 BC) Roman writer of comic plays.



France.<sup>12</sup> In the same year Lessing published his translation of Diderot's plays in *The Theatre of Mr Diderot* (1760).

Practice had even more impact than theory. In 1755 Lessing had published his play *Miss Sara Sampson*, first produced in Frankfurt on the Oder with great success – the audience was in floods of tears at each performance. The play was much influenced by George Lillo's *The London Merchant; or, the History of George Barnwell* (1731) and by Richardson's novels. A tragedy about a seduced girl, in a contemporary everyday setting, was an affront to those who believed that all tragedy should be in high style and noble. 'A bourgeois tragedy! My God ... what is to become of us?' was Lessing's own ironic comment.<sup>13</sup>

About this time too Lessing had been studying Winckelmann's *Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture* (1755) and his *History of the Art of Antiquity* (1764). In 1755 he had translated du Bos's *Critical Reflections on Poetry and Painting*.<sup>14</sup> Lessing's own work on aesthetics was *Laoköon, or the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, in 1766, a work which came to be considered as one of the most important works on aesthetics in the eighteenth century. Winckelmann himself was impressed by Lessing's style of writing, though critical of his knowledge of the subject.

In the meantime there had been changes in Lessing's way of life. His one chance to go to England, in 1756, as travelling companion to a young businessman, Gottfried Winkler, was frustrated by the outbreak of the Seven Years' War. In 1760 he accepted the position of secretary to General Bogislaw Friedrich von Tauentzien, who was Prussian commandant in Breslau. Lessing wrote to his friends with no particular enthusiasm about the kind of life he led, but for a while his financial position improved. He could even indulge a little his love for gambling, which he could seldom afford, but in which he found excitement. Lessing fell seriously ill in Breslau and left his job before the end of the war. He had been proposed for the job of librarian in the Royal Library in Berlin, but Frederick, no doubt remembering Voltaire's complaints about Lessing, refused to consider him.

In his essay *On German Literature* (1780), Frederick the Great made no mention of Lessing and made only unfavourable general comments on German drama. Lessing's next work makes this omission even more striking. In 1767 appeared *Minna von Barnhelm*, a contemporary comedy, in which the action takes place at the end of the Seven Years' War. Goethe called it: 'The truest product of the Seven Years' War, the first

<sup>12</sup> Eighteenth-century views of sentiment are discussed in the Introduction to Part E of the course.

<sup>13</sup> 26 April 1755 in the *Berlin Gazette*.

<sup>14</sup> Abbé Jean-Baptiste du Bos (1670–1742) *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et la peinture* (1719).



theatre production taken from real life, with a specific contemporary content'.<sup>15</sup> It was seen at the time, and can still be seen now, as the best modern comedy of the century in German. It was an instant success on the stage, first in Hamburg, then in Berlin.

Lessing then took part in one of the most interesting experiments in the theatre of the time. A consortium of affluent citizens of the free city of Hamburg launched a 'national theatre'. Lessing was invited to become resident critic and adviser. He accepted. In this role he produced a work of lasting importance: *The Hamburg Dramaturgy* (1767). This is a collection of his reviews and commentaries. He soon had to give up writing about performances, as the actors were touchy about genuinely critical reviews, but the work continued as essays on the drama. The project failed. The directors quarrelled and there were financial problems. Lessing himself lost money heavily in a printing venture, had to sell his library, and consider what to do next.

He had made good friends in Hamburg, among them the son and daughter of Hermann Samuel Reimarus, philologist and orientalist, and a silk merchant. Engelbert König, and his wife, Eva. Englebert König died suddenly at the end of 1769, and Lessing had promised to look after his wife and children – a promise which he kept, although he had to leave Hamburg, as he had just accepted the position of Librarian at Wolfenbüttel.

### ***Wolfenbüttel – controversial Librarian***

In accepting the post of Librarian in the great library of the Duke of Brunswick in Wolfenbüttel, Lessing was giving in at last and accepting patronage. As a scholar he found the work rewarding and discovered some valuable manuscripts, (including an eleventh-century manuscript of Berengar de Tours, the discovery of which made an important contribution to church history). Yet he was lonely, isolated in a gloomy, empty castle, since the Duke's court had moved to Brunswick. He had a secure position, but he was still poor, even though he was now eminent as a writer. *Minna von Barnhelm* was being performed with great success, and his new play, a tragedy, *Emilia Galotti*, was first performed in Brunswick in 1772, and highly praised.

For Lessing personal plans became most important. Slowly his friendship with Eva König became love, and they decided to marry; but Eva, who was a woman of courage, charm and intelligence, had had to take over her late husband's business affairs, which involved lengthy journeys and long stays in Vienna. Over the years it was a friendship, then courtship by correspondence, with rare meetings. Eventually, Lessing managed to secure from the Duke of Brunswick a higher salary and a

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<sup>15</sup> Goethe, *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (*Poetry and Truth*), Part II Book 7.



house in Wolfenbüttel. They married in 1776. For one year of his life Lessing was perfectly happy; but at the end of the year Eva had a child who died, and shortly afterwards she too died. Lessing found only one way to cope with his personal tragedy, and that was to work, and work meant fighting – and fighting about fundamental religious issues which had concerned him all his life.

A few months after his wife's death, Lessing became involved in a very bitter and very public controversy. It came to a head in 1778, although it had started some years before. Publication of really controversial views on religion was still hazardous. One notable man with radical views was Professor Reimarus (1694–1768) of Hamburg, the father of Lessing's two friends. He had written an *Apologia or Plea for the Rational Worshippers of God* (*Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes*, 1778). He did not venture to publish it in his lifetime. Lessing had acquired the manuscript (and was carefully evasive about how he had done so) and used his right as Wolfenbüttel Librarian to publish extracts as *Fragments of an Anonymous Author* in 1774 and 1777. Hostile comments came from critics of modest standing, to which Lessing's most notable reply was the essay 'eine Duplik' ('A Rejoinder'); but then more imposing critics joined in. Lessing's main opponent was Johann Melchior Goeze (1717–86), Chief Pastor of the Katherinenkirche in Hamburg, an orthodox Lutheran theologian and scholar. For some months in 1778 the battle was conducted, through a series of pamphlets, about criticism of revealed religion and the right to express such views. Lessing's opponents succeeded in persuading the Duke of Brunswick to withdraw the Librarian's right to publish papers, and Lessing was forbidden to publish anything more on religion. His response was to put his ideas into the play *Nathan the Wise*, which made a strong case for the unprejudiced pursuit of religious truth and for toleration.<sup>16</sup>

In 1778 Lessing had published the first part of his *Gespräche für Freymäurer* (*Ernst and Falk: Dialogues on Freemasonry*), and in 1780 he published *The Education of the Human Race* (*Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*). By then he was exhausted and ill, and wrote no more major works. He died in Brunswick in 1781.

### ***Chronological outline of Lessing's life and main works***

- 1729      born 22 January in Kamenz, Saxony.
- 1741–6    At St Afra electoral school in Meissen.
- 1746–8    Student at University of Leipzig.
- 1748      *The Young Scholar* performed by the Neuber company.

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<sup>16</sup> There is a detailed discussion of the religious controversy in Lessing and Religion in *Religion and Humanity: Lessing's Nathan the Wise* (Studies, II).



- 1748 In Wittenberg. At the end of the year goes to Berlin.
- 1749 Writes *The Jews*.
- 1750 Journalist for the *Berlin Gazette* with his cousin Johann Christlob Mylius.
- 1751 Translation of Voltaire's *Minor Historical Works*.
- 1752 In Wittenberg obtains Master's degree.
- 1753–5 Publication of collected works in six volumes.
- 1753 Translates Marigny's *History of the Arabs*.
- 1754 *The Jews* and *The Young Scholar* published.
- 1754 Meets Friedrich Nicolai and Moses Mendelssohn.
- 1755 *Pope – a Metaphysician!* written with Mendelssohn.
- 1755 The *Freethinker* published.
- 1755 Translation of du Bos's *Critical Reflections on Poetry and Painting*.
- 1755 *Miss Sara Sampson* performed and published.
- 1756 Journey to England interrupted by the Seven Years' War.
- 1757 In Leipzig.
- 1758–60 In Berlin.
- 1759 *Letters on Modern Literature*.
- 1759 *Philotas* – a tragedy.
- Fables
- 1760 *The Theatre of Mr Diderot*.
- 1760–5 In Breslau as secretary to General von Tauentzien.
- 1764 Serious illness in Breslau.
- 1765–7 In Berlin.
- 1766 *Laoköon or the Limits of Painting and Poetry*.
- 1767 *Minna von Barnhelm*.
- 1767–70 In Hamburg as critic and adviser for the Hamburg theatre.
- 1767 *Hamburg Dramaturgy*.
- 1769 *Antiquarian Letters*.
- The Ancients' View of Death*.
- Friendship with the Reimarus and König families.
- 1770 Librarian of the ducal library in Wolfenbüttel.
- 1771 Engagement to Eva König.
- 1772 *Emilia Galotti*.



- 1774 Publishes first *Fragments of an Anonymous Author*.
- 1775 Journey to Leipzig, Dresden, Vienna.  
Journey to Italy with Prince Leopold of Brunswick.
- 1776 Marriage to Eva König.
- 1777 Journey to Mannheim. Refuses offer to direct Mannheim theatre.
- 1778 Death of his wife Eva.
- 1778 Dispute with Chief Pastor Goeze. *Anti-Goeze* pamphlets.
- 1778 *Ernst and Falk* – dialogues for freemasons.
- 1779 *Nathan the Wise*.
- 1780 *The Education of the Human Race*.
- 1781 15 February, died in Brunswick.

## Nathan the Wise

### *The setting of the play*

The scene of the play is given as Jerusalem. The action takes place during an armistice in the Crusades. The year therefore must be 1192 at the end of the Third Crusade which lasted from 1189 to 1192. There are references in the play to Richard I (Coeur de Lion) and Philippe August II of France who were both in Palestine in 1191, and to Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa, who also took part in the Crusade and was drowned in Armenia in 1190.

The Crusades were military expeditions, fostered by the Papacy, undertaken from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries by European Christians. The aim was to gain the Christian holy places in Palestine, then under Muslim occupation. After some successful military operations the Kingdom of Jerusalem was established and had then to be defended. In 1187 Sultan Saladin recaptured Jerusalem. The aim of the Third Crusade, led by the English and French kings and the German emperor, was to regain Jerusalem. The Europeans did not succeed in doing this, but Saladin made a treaty with Richard I, in effect an agreement to a three year armistice, which included permission for unarmed Christians to visit the holy places in Jerusalem.

Lessing's main historical source was François Louis Claude Marin's (1721–1809) *History of Saladin Sultan of Egypt and Syria*, (*Histoire de Saladin. Sulthan d'Egypte et de Syrie*, Paris 1758), translated into German by E.G. Küster, 1761. Lessing had himself translated Voltaire's *History of the*



*Crusades* in 1751 and Abbé de Marigny's *History of the Arabs* in 1753 (*Histoire des Arabes sous le Gouvernement des Califes*, Paris, 1750).

Lessing did not set out to write a historical play. He was not concerned with historical accuracy, although such details as he gives broadly fit in with the historical facts, except for some points of chronology: for example, Saladin's father, who is mentioned, was no longer alive in 1192, and it is implied in the play that Frederick Barbarossa had died many years before. There is also a quite deliberate anachronistic reference to the theatre.

Lessing's main concern was to present his parable in circumstances where Christians, Jews and Muslims could plausibly be in communication. He had made an uncompromising comment on the Crusades in the *Hamburg Dramaturgy* (Part 7): 'These Crusades, which in their inception had been a political stratagem of the Popes, in practice led to the most inhuman persecutions of which Christian superstition has ever been guilty.'

### *The characters*

*Sultan Saladin* The historical Salah-el-Din lived from 1138 to 1193. He was a Kurd who first gained power in Egypt, then waged successful campaigns in Syria and Mesopotamia, and conquered Jerusalem in 1187. Saladin made a treaty with Richard I in 1192 (see above). The plan, mentioned in the play, to marry Richard's sister Johanna to Saladin's brother Melek seems to have some foundation in fact.

*Sittah* Saladin had a sister called Sitt-alscham (also Sillah-Alscham in Marin's history). This suggested the name to Lessing.

*Nathan* Lessing based the scenes with the parable of the three rings on a story in Boccaccio's *Decameron* in which a Jew named Melchisedech plays the main part. Lessing chose instead the name Nathan, an Old Testament prophet, for his principal character, as a more suitable name to use for his verse drama.

*Recha* was called Rahel in Lessing's first draft of the play.

*Daja* 'As I understand it, Daja means something like Nutrix (nurse)' Lessing noted in his draft of the play.

*A young Templar* The order of Knights Templar was founded in 1118, to protect pilgrims to the Holy Land. The name came from the fact that the order's base was near to what was held to be Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. The Templars took vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Their uniform was a white cloak with a octagonal red cross on the breast.

*A Dervish* A Muhammadan mendicant monk.

*The Patriarch of Jerusalem* The bishop of Jerusalem. From the fifth century the bishops of Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Byzantium and Jerusalem were given the rank of Patriarch. The Patriarch at the time of the Third Crusade was Heraklius, an infamous character according to Marin's *History of Saladin*.



*A Lay Brother* Lay brothers were not ordained, took only a vow of obedience, and carried out humbler tasks in monasteries.

*An Emir* An independent Muslim ruler.

*Mamelukes* Members of the Sultan's bodyguard.

### *The verse form and translation*

Lessing chose to use blank verse, that is unrhymed iambic pentameters. Up to this time blank verse had been rarely used in German, but soon, in the plays of Goethe and Schiller and other dramatists, it became the verse form most often used in German drama.

Lessing was a master of vigorous, incisive prose and of dramatic language. His use of the verse in *Nathan the Wise* seems almost casual: it is clearly subordinated to the needs of the drama. It uses everyday, even colloquial language, appropriate to the different characters: the direct and simple language of the Lay Brother, the Patriarch's pious clichés, the sometimes 'romantic' language of the Templar, the changing styles of Nathan himself in different contexts. Lessing's friends pointed to much that was 'incorrect' in the early drafts, such as many lines with six or four feet instead of five. Lessing eliminated some of these, but gave priority to meaning and dramatic effect. Frequent *enjambements*<sup>17</sup> are necessary, for the sake of the dialogue; in long sentences over many lines predicate and subject may be separated, pronouns or adverbs may not be used in the same line as the words with which they are associated. But Lessing had his own good reasons for this use of language, and remained in control. A more obviously 'poetic' feature in the play is its imagery, the recurring images of fire and water, trees and flowers – images intended to stimulate ideas and establish connections in the mind of the reader. There are biblical references or allusions, possibly more familiar to Lessing's contemporaries than to present-day readers. In the play as a whole, the flexibility of the verse, even its uneven rhythms, contribute to the intensity of its forward-moving ideas.

Inevitably much is lost in translation. The translation conveys Lessing's meaning as faithfully as possible, in a verse form which has some correspondence with Lessing's own. Complex German constructions have been simplified where this does not distort the meaning; the play on words in which Lessing delighted emerges in somewhat muted form; his juxtapositions and play on the sound of words tend to get lost, and epigrammatic phrases lose force. But the play's pace, concentrated flow of ideas, its fairly colloquial style, its general informality and humour perhaps emerge.

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<sup>17</sup> enjambement – in verse, the carrying on the sense of a line or couplet into the next.



# Nathan the Wise

*A dramatic poem in five acts*

*Introite, nam et heic Dii sunt!*

*Apud Gellium*

by

*Gotthold Ephraim Lessing*

1779

## *Dramatis Personae*

Sultan Saladin

Sittah, his sister

Nathan, a rich Jew in Jerusalem

Recha, his adopted daughter

Daja, a Christian but living in the house of the Jew, as Recha's companion

A young Templar

A Dervish

The Patriarch of Jerusalem

A Lay Brother

An Emir

and Mamelukes of Saladin

The scene is Jerusalem at the end of the twelfth century.

[**Note.** The lines have been numbered to correspond with those of the German text. In a few cases where the English translation is shorter, an adjustment has been made, and this is indicated against the lines in question.]



*Gotthold Ephraim Lessing*  
**Nathan the Wise**

## Act I

### Scene 1

# Nathan and Daja

*(Scene: A hall in Nathan's house. Nathan comes in from his journey. Daja meets him.)*

DAJA            He's here! It's Nathan! God be praised  
                      That you have come back home at last.

NATHAN      Yes, Daja, God be praised. But why *at last?*  
Did I intend to come home any sooner?  
Could I if I'd wished to? Babylon  
Is from Jerusalem at least two hundred miles  
Away along the route I was  
Obliged to take, with detours right and left.  
Collecting in of debts is not a job  
That makes a journey shorter, not something  
That is rushed, or quickly set aside.

DAJA Oh Nathan,  
When I think how wretched you'd have been  
If you had stayed at home. Your house ...

NATHAN

Was burnt.

Yes, that I have already learned – God grant  
That they have really told me everything.

15

DAJA And it was nearly totally destroyed.

NATHAN      Then, Daja, we'd have simply built ourselves  
Another – and a better one.

DAJA    That's true.  
Yet Recha was so very nearly burnt  
To death.

NATHAN                      My Recha, burnt to death? My Recha? 20  
I had not heard that. Well then I would not  
Have needed any house. So she was nearly  
Burnt to death! You mean it's really true?  
She's burnt to death! Just tell me now straight out!  
Admit it! – kill me: torture me no longer. 25  
– Yes, she's burnt to death!



DAJA If that were so  
Would you be hearing it from me?

NATHAN      Why do you terrify me then? – O Recha  
O, my Recha.

DA|A Yours? Your Recha?

NATHAN      If ever I no longer were allowed  
To call this child my own!

DAJA Can you call everything  
That you possess with equal right  
Your own?

NATHAN                      Nothing with greater right. All else  
That I possess has been bestowed on me  
By nature or good fortune. This alone  
I owe to virtue.

DAJA                                Nathan, what a price  
You make me pay for all your kindness.  
If kindness carried out with such intent  
Can still deserve that name.

NATHAN                      With such intent?

                                With what intent?

DAJA My conscience ...

NATHAN Daja, first 40  
Of all, just let me tell you what I bought ...

DAJA I can't ignore my conscience ...

NATHAN

What lovely cloth  
I bought for you in Babylon. So rich  
And yet so elegant as well. Recha  
Herself will scarce have any finer.

[illegible]

NATHAN      I wonder how you'll like the bracelets, earrings  
Necklace and the ring which I selected  
Just for you when I was in Damascus. 50  
I really long to know.

DAJA                      That's so like you!  
Only content if you can give and give!

NATHAN      Take gladly, as I give – and say no more!

DAJA            No more! Who questions, Nathan, that there's none  
More honest and more generous than you. 55  
And yet! ...







DAJA	A young Knight Templar who, not many days Ago was brought here as a captive, then Was pardoned by the Sultan Saladin.	85
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NATHAN      What? Saladin has spared a Templar's life?  
A *Templar's life*? Only such a miracle  
Could save my Recha? Oh God!

DAJA	Without	
	This man who boldly risked his life again	90
	Which he had just regained, she would have died.	

NATHAN      Where is he, Daja, where's this noble man?  
Where is he? Let me go and kneel to him.  
I hope you gave him first of all, those treasures  
Which I left you? Gave him everything?  
And promised more, much more?

DATA How could we?

NATHAN            You did not?

DAJA

He came, no one knows from where,  
He went, and no one knows where to – without  
A knowledge of the house, and guided just  
By what he heard, he rushed with cloak outspread 100  
Boldly through flame and smoke to reach the voice  
Of someone crying ‘Help!’ By then we thought  
He must be lost – But from the smoke and flame  
He suddenly appeared. In his strong arms  
He held her safe. Coldly and quite unmoved 105  
By all our praise and thanks, he set her down,  
Forced his way through the crowd who waited there –  
And disappeared.

NATHAN                      Not for ever, I should hope.

DAJA      Afterwards for several days we saw  
Him walking up and down beneath the palms      110  
Which shade the Holy Sepulchre.<sup>19</sup>  
I went up to him with rapture, thanked him.  
Praised him, implored, besought him just once more  
To see the gentle pious girl who  
Cannot now find rest, until she's thanked him      115  
With many tears, kneeling at his feet.

NATHAN      And then?

DAJA                      In vain! Deaf to our request  
He poured such bitter scorn on me especially ...

<sup>19</sup> The grave of the resurrected Christ.







To dwell with us below a little while,  
 Playing at chivalry with such ill grace,  
 I'll surely find him out and bring him here. 160

DAJA It won't be easy. Nathan.

NATHAN Then perhaps  
 The sweet dream will give way to sweeter truth –  
 Believe me, Daja, to a human being  
 A human is much dearer than an angel.  
 So you will not blame me too much, I hope, 165  
 When you shall see our angel-dreamer cured.

DAJA You are so good, and yet you are so bad!  
 I'll go. But – listen! – look! – she's coming here herself.

## Scene 2

Recha, Nathan and Daja

RECHA Father! So it *is* you, safe and sound.  
 I thought it might be just your voice, sent on 170  
 Ahead. Why have you stopped out here? What hills,  
 What deserts and what streams divide us now?  
 You're breathing in a room just next to mine  
 Instead of rushing to embrace your Recha –  
 Poor Recha who was meanwhile burnt to death! 175  
 Or nearly burnt, just nearly. So don't shudder!  
 It is a dreadful death, to burn.

NATHAN My child, my dearest child!

RECHA You must have crossed  
 Euphrates, Tigris, Jordan: and who knows  
 How many other rivers? – Often I 180  
 Have trembled for you, until the fire came  
 So near to me. But since the fire has come  
 So near to me: to die in water seems  
 Refreshment, comfort, and deliverance.  
 And yet you are not drowned, and I have not 185  
 Been burnt to death. Let us now rejoice  
 And praise our God. He surely bore you and  
 Your boat on wings of his unseen angels  
 Across the treacherous streams. And it was God  
 Who beckoned to my angel to be seen, 190  
 Carrying me through the flames on his white wings.

NATHAN (On his white wings – of course!, That must have been  
 The Templar's white and outspread cloak)<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> The Templar's uniform was a white cloak with an octagonal red cross on the left breast.



- RECHA Visibly, *visibly*  
 He bore me through the fire, protected by  
 His wings. And so I saw an angel, and 195  
 I saw him face to face; He was my *own*  
 Angel.
- NATHAN Worthy of my Recha. And  
 There's nothing fairer she would see in him  
 Than he in her.
- RECHA (*smiling*)  
 Whom do you flatter, father,  
 The angel, or yourself?
- NATHAN Yet if he were 200  
 A human – such as nature shows us every day,  
 Who rendered you this service, he would seem  
 To you an angel. He must and so he would.
- RECHA Not that kind of angel, no! A real one:  
 He was, I'm sure, a real one! Haven't you 205  
 Taught me yourself that angels really could  
 Exist, and miracles are worked by God  
 To benefit all those who love him truly?  
 I do love him.
- NATHAN Yes, and he loves you  
 And hourly he works miracles for you 210  
 And those like you. So has he done for all  
 Eternity.
- RECHA That makes me happy.
- NATHAN Why?  
 It might sound natural and commonplace  
 If he who saved you were a real Templar  
 Knight; but surely that would be no less a 215  
 Miracle! – The greatest miracle  
 Is that those miracles which are both real and true  
 Can and do become so commonplace to us.  
 Without this universal miracle  
 No thinking person would call miracles 220  
 Those things which only seem so to a child,  
 Who stares at and pursues the strangest things,  
 Struck only by their novelty.
- DAJA (TO  
 NATHAN) Are you  
 Intending to destroy her mind, already  
 So inflamed, with all this subtlety? 225
- NATHAN Patience! For my Recha isn't it a  
 Miracle enough that she was rescued



By a human being who himself was earlier  
Saved by no small miracle. Indeed  
A miracle! Whoever heard of any 230  
Templar Knight reprieved by Saladin?  
Or any Templar who has asked or hoped  
That he would spare him? Or who offered more  
To him for freedom than the leather belt<sup>21</sup>  
Which holds his sword, or at most his dagger? 235

RECHA      Father that proves my point, that he was not  
A Templar Knight. He merely looked like one –  
No Templar who was captured ever comes  
Into Jerusalem except to certain death;  
No Templar walks so freely in Jerusalem: 240  
How could any Templar have been free  
To save me in the dark?

NATHAN      Why, that's well argued,  
Now, Daja, tell us. For it was from you  
That I have heard that he was sent here as  
A prisoner. I'm sure you must know more. 245

DAJA      Well yes – that's what they say – but they  
Also say that Saladin has pardoned  
Him because he looks so like one of  
His brothers, one whom he loved dearly.  
But as it's more than twenty years ago now 250  
Since this brother was alive – and I don't  
Know his name – and don't know where he died,  
It all just sounds so – so incredible,  
I dare say that there's nothing in it.

NATHAN      Daja, Why should such a thing be so 255  
Incredible? Surely not because  
You've chosen to believe in something *more*  
Incredible, as others do? Saladin  
Loves all his family. He might indeed  
Have loved one of his brothers in particular 260  
When he was young. And you'll agree it's true  
Two faces often look alike – are  
Impressions lost because they're old? And doesn't  
The same cause produce the same effect?  
It must. What is incredible in this? 265  
But I suppose, wise Daja, that you'd not

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<sup>21</sup> The belt in fact was of linen not leather, but if a Templar gave up his belt, he renounced his adherence to the order.







You might give thanks, and sigh and pray to him;  
 You might dissolve in tears of ecstasy;  
 You might celebrate his festivals  
 By fasting, or give alms – but all that's nothing. 310  
 It strikes me that your dear ones and yourselves  
 Gain far more by all this than he. He won't  
 Get fat from all your fasting, or get rich  
 From your donations; he won't gain in splendour  
 From your ecstasy, he won't be mightier 315  
 By your faith. But if he were a man!

DAJA Yes, if he were a man there would be greater  
 Opportunity to *do* something.  
 And God knows, we were eager to serve him.  
 But he wanted nothing, needed nothing 320  
 From us; in himself, and with himself  
 He was content, as angels are, and only  
 Angels can be.

RECHA When at last he vanished ...

NATHAN Vanished? – Really vanished? – You no longer  
 Saw him walk beneath the palms? But have 325  
 You really made a thorough search for him?

DAJA Well, no, we haven't.

NATHAN How's that possible?  
 What's the harm, you say – you cruel dreamers! –  
 Suppose this angel now – had fallen ill?

RECHA Ill?

DAJA Ill! He's surely not!

RECHA A cold chill makes 330  
 Me shudder. Daja! feel my face. It was  
 So warm and now it's just like ice.

NATHAN He's  
 A Frank,<sup>22</sup> who's unaccustomed to our climate.  
 He's young, not hardened to the rigours of  
 His order, to the hunger, sleeplessness. 335

RECHA Ill!

DAJA Nathan only means he might be.

NATHAN Lying there, with neither friends nor gold  
 To buy himself some friends.

RECHA Oh father, no!

<sup>22</sup> Since the first Crusade (1096–99), which started in France, Frank was used in the Middle East to denote all European Christians.



- NATHAN      He lies bereft of nursing, sympathy,  
Or help, a prey to suffering and death!      340
- RECHA      Where? Where?
- NATHAN      For someone he had never known  
Or seen – simply for a human being,  
He rushed into the fire ...
- DAJA      Nathan, spare her!
- NATHAN      He did not want to know the one he'd saved,  
Nor see her any more, he only wanted      345  
To avoid her thanks ...
- DAJA      Spare her, Nathan!
- NATHAN      He had no wish to see her any more – unless  
He had to rescue her a second time  
Enough, it was a human being ...
- DAJA      Stop!
- NATHAN      His only consolation as he dies      350  
Is his awareness of this deed!
- DAJA      Stop!  
You're killing her!
- NATHAN      And you have killed him! – or  
You could have done so. – Recha, Recha, I am  
Offering you medicine not poison.  
He's alive – calm down! – he's probably not ill;      355  
Not even ill.
- RECHA      Really? Not dead? Not ill?
- NATHAN      Really, He's not dead! For God rewards us  
In this world for doing good. Now,  
See, how rapturous dreaming is much easier  
Than doing good. The weakest people like      360  
To indulge in pious rapture – even though  
They're often unaware of why they do it –  
Simply to avoid the work of doing  
Good.
- RECHA      Father, don't ever leave your Recha  
On her own again – You think perhaps      365  
He's only gone away?
- NATHAN      Yes, yes, – Of course –  
But I can see a Muslim with enquiring  
Eyes examining my laden camels.  
Do you know who he is?
- DAJA      Ah! your dervish.
- NATHAN      Who?



DAJA                               Your dervish. Your old chess companion.                               370

NATHAN                       Al-Hafi? That's Al-Hafi?

DAJA   He's become  
The Sultan's Treasurer.

NATHAN   Is this a dream  
Again? It is Al-Hafi, coming here!  
Quick, go in. What has he got to say?

### Scene 3

#### Nathan and the Dervish

DERVISH                       Open your eyes, as wide as they can go!                               375

NATHAN                       Is it you? Or isn't it? – In such fine clothes,  
A dervish!

DERVISH                                       Well? Why not then? Do you think  
A dervish can't make something of himself?

NATHAN                       Well, yes, of course, – But I was thinking that  
A dervish – that's a real dervish – chooses                               380  
To make nothing of himself.

DERVISH   By the Prophet,<sup>23</sup>  
It may well be that I am no real dervish,  
But if one must –

NATHAN                                       Must! Dervish! – A dervish must?  
No-one must must,<sup>24</sup> and a dervish must.  
What must he then?

DERVISH   What he is rightly asked to do                               385  
And knows is good – that's what a dervish must.

NATHAN                       By our God! You speak the truth – Let me  
Embrace you, man – I hope you're still my friend?

DERVISH                       And you don't ask first what I have become?

NATHAN                       In spite of that!

DERVISH   But what if I'd become                               390  
A state official in fine robes, one whose  
Friendship could be awkward?

NATHAN   If your heart  
Is still a dervish's, I'll take the risk.  
The state official's robes are just your dress.

<sup>23</sup> i.e. by Mohammed! – equivalent of by God!

<sup>24</sup> 'Kein Mensch muss müssen' in the German text.



- DERVISH But even that commands respect. What do 395  
You think? What would I be at *your* court?
- NATHAN Just  
A dervish – nothing more. Though now I come  
To think about it, probably the cook.
- DERVISH Oh yes?  
I'd soon forget my skill in *your* house. Cook!  
Why not the butler? See how Saladin 400  
Appreciates me better – I've become  
His treasurer.
- NATHAN You? For him?
- DERVISH Of  
The lesser treasury – his father manages  
The greater. I control the household treasury.  
His house is great.
- NATHAN
- DERVISH And greater than you think; 405  
For every beggar is a part of it.
- NATHAN But Saladin's the enemy of beggars –
- DERVISH He's intent on getting rid of them,  
Root and branch – even if he then himself  
Becomes a beggar.
- NATHAN Bravo! – That's my view. 410
- DERVISH He's very near to being one by now.  
Each day by dusk his treasury becomes  
Much emptier than empty. For the tide  
Which flows in high each morning by midday  
Has flowed away –
- NATHAN For channels drain away 415  
A part of it, and there's no way to fill  
Or seal them up again.
- DERVISH Exactly.
- NATHAN Understood.
- DERVISH Of course it's bad enough  
If princes are like vultures among carrion.  
But if they're carrion among vultures 420  
That is ten times worse.
- NATHAN Oh no, dervish!  
Not so!
- DERVISH It's no use wasting words. So let us see  
What would you offer me if I give up  
My post to you?
- NATHAN What do you earn?



- DERVISH Me?  
Not much. But you could make a handsome profit. 425  
When the treasure's at its lowest ebb –  
You open up your floodgates – make advances,  
And claim any rate of interest.
- NATHAN And interest on the interest too?
- DERVISH Of course.
- NATHAN Until my capital is nothing more 430  
Than interest.
- DERVISH It doesn't tempt you? Then  
You'd better write a farewell letter to  
Our friendship. I was really counting on you.
- NATHAN Really? How?
- DERVISH I thought that you might help me  
Carry out my office with some honour. 435  
That I could use you as a source of funds –  
You shake your head?
- NATHAN Let's understand each other.  
A distinction must be made. For you, Al-Hafi,  
Why not? I'm always ready to do anything  
To help my friend the dervish. But 440  
Al-Hafi, treasurer to Saladin,  
To such a man ...
- DERVISH I thought as much. You're still  
As good as you are shrewd, and as shrewd  
As you are wise! Be patient. Soon the two  
Al-Hafis you distinguish will be separate 445  
Again. Look at this robe from Saladin  
Before it's worn out, and reduced to rags,  
Which are the proper clothing of a dervish,  
I'll hang it on a peg here in Jerusalem,  
And go off to the Ganges<sup>25</sup> where, with light 450  
And naked feet, I'll tread the hot sands with  
My teachers.
- NATHAN Just like you!
- DERVISH And I'll play chess  
With them.
- NATHAN Your highest bliss!
- DERVISH What tempted me –  
The prospect that my begging days were over?

---

<sup>25</sup> The holy river of the Hindus.



A chance to play the rich man to the beggars? 455  
 The ability to transform in a flash  
 The richest beggar to a poor rich man?

NATHAN

Not that, I'm sure.

DERVISH

No, even more banal;  
 The new experience of being flattered;  
 Flattered by the Sultan's generous caprice. 460

NATHAN

Which was?

DERVISH

'Only a beggar knows how beggars  
 Feel; only a beggar knows, from his  
 Experience, just how to give to beggars.  
 Your predecessor was too cold', he said,  
 'Too harsh. He was so grudging when he gave: 465  
 He asked so many awkward questions first  
 About the recipient. Although he knew  
 There was a need, he wasn't satisfied  
 Unless he knew the *cause* of need. And so  
 The gift was meanly balanced with the cause. 470  
 Al-Hafi won't do that. And Saladin  
 With Hafi's help won't seem so niggardly.  
 Al-Hafi won't be like those blocked-up water pipes  
 Which spew out frothing and unclean  
 The water which came in so clear and still. 475  
 Al-Hafi thinks, Al-Hafi feels as I do!"  
 So sweetly trilled the fowler's pipe until  
 The bird was in the net! – Oh what a fool  
 I am! A fool of fools!

NATHAN

Gently, my dervish.

Gently!

DERVISH

Isn't it plain folly, when 480  
 A hundred thousand people are oppressed,  
 Impoverished, despoiled, tortured, slaughtered,  
 To play philanthropist to individuals?  
 Isn't it foolishness to simulate  
 The Almighty's mercy, which he casts impartially 485  
 On good and bad, on field and desert, both  
 In sunshine and in rain – to simulate it,  
 But without the hand of the Almighty  
 Which is always full. Don't tell me that's  
 Not folly.

NATHAN

That's enough, Al-Hafi!

DERVISH

And 490

My folly. Just consider that! Isn't  
 It folly to detect a trace of goodness



In this foolishness, and just because  
Of one good element, to take a part  
In all this foolishness myself? Well?  
Isn't that the truth?

NATHAN                                 Al-Hafi – you must  
Go back to your desert. If you stay  
Among the human race you might forget  
To be a human.

DERVISH                      That's what I fear.  
Farewell.

NATHAN                      But why are you in such a hurry? 500  
Wait, Al-Hafi! Will your desert run  
Away? If he'd just listen! – Hey, Al-Hafi, stop! –  
He's gone; I really should have liked to ask  
Him all about our Templar. I imagine  
He must know him.

### Scene 4

## Daja and Nathan

DAJA (hurrying in)

# Nathan, Nathan!

NATHAN Well?  
What is it now?

DAJA            He has appeared again! He has  
                      Appeared again!

NATHAN                      Who, Daja? Who?

DAJA He! He!

NATHAN      He? He? – When hasn't He appeared!<sup>26</sup> – Ah yes,  
For you, there's just one He. – He shouldn't be!  
Not even if he were an angel! 510

DAJA            He's strolling up and down under the  
Palms; and he picks dates from time to time.

NATHAN      And eats them too? – as if he were a Templar?

DAJA                Why tease me? – Recha's eager eyes caught sight  
Of him between the dense rows of the palms  
And followed him intently – now she asks you –  
Pleads with you – to go and see him right away.  
Hurry! She'll signal from the window  
If he's coming up this way or turning  
Back. Please hurry!

<sup>26</sup> For Nathan 'He' means God.







TEMPLAR      Where I was hoping now to find a modest Pilgrim's meal?

LAY BROTHER                 The tables were already                 545  
Full; but come back with me now, sir.

TEMPLAR Why?  
I haven't eaten meat for some time now.  
There's no need anyway. The dates are ripe.

LAY BROTHER Take care, sir, when you eat this sort of fruit.  
It doesn't do to eat too much, it blocks  
The spleen, and makes for melancholy blood. 550

TEMPLAR      And what if I'm inclined to melancholy?  
But it wasn't just to warn me about this  
That you were sent to me?

LAY BROTHER    Oh no! – I'm  
Just supposed to find out more about you,  
Sound you out.

555

TEMPLAR                      You tell me that yourself?

## LAY BROTHER Why not?

TEMPLAR (A cunning brother, this) – And has  
The monastery more like you?

[illegible]

TEMPLAR                      And so you just  
Obey and don't ask many questions then?                      560

LAY BROTHER Sir, would I be obedient otherwise?

TEMPLAR (That shows simplicity is always in  
The right!) Are you allowed to tell me who  
It is who wants to know me better? I would  
Swear it's not yourself.

LAY BROTHER                      Would it be fitting                      565  
Or of use for me?

TEMPLAR So who thinks it  
Fitting and of use to be so curious?

LAY BROTHER The Patriarch, I think. He sent me here  
To look for you.

TEMPLAR                      The Patriarch? Surely  
He knows the Templar's white cloak with the red cross 570  
Better than that!

LAY BROTHER I do!

TEMPLAR    Well then, brother  
I am a Templar and a prisoner –







- LAY BROTHER Yes, he has,  
I'm told to sound you out, sir, and to see  
If you're the man he wants.
- TEMPLAR Well, sound me out!  
(I'll see what form this sounding takes) – Well?
- LAY BROTHER The quickest way will be to tell you, sir, 605  
Exactly what the Patriarch's wishes are.
- TEMPLAR What are they?
- LAY BROTHER He would like you to deliver  
A short letter for him, sir.
- TEMPLAR Me? I'm  
Not a messenger – Is this the glorious  
Deed, more glorious than rescuing 610  
A Jewish girl from fire?
- LAY BROTHER It must be. For  
The contents of this letter, says the Patriarch,  
Are vital to the whole of Christendom.  
The safe delivery of this letter – says  
The Patriarch – will be rewarded by 615  
Our Father with a special crown in Heaven.  
No-one – says the Patriarch – is worthier  
To wear this crown than you, sir.
- TEMPLAR I?
- LAY BROTHER There's hardly anybody – says the Patriarch –  
Who's better qualified to earn 620  
This crown than you, good sir.
- TEMPLAR Than I?
- LAY BROTHER You're free  
Here; you can look around you everywhere;  
You understand how to attack or to  
Defend a town; you're well placed – says the Patriarch –  
To assess the strength and weakness of 625  
The inner second wall which Saladin  
Has just had built. You could describe it to  
The warriors of God in detail, says  
The Patriarch.
- TEMPLAR Good brother, could you tell me  
More about the contents of this letter? 630
- LAY BROTHER Well, I don't know very much about it,  
But it is a letter to King Philip.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Philippe II (1165–1223), King of France, who had returned to France after the capture of Acre.



The Patriarch ... I've often asked myself  
 How such a holy man, who dedicates  
 His life to Heaven, at the same time can 635  
 Demean himself to be so well informed  
 Of worldly things. It must be hard for him!

TEMPLAR Well then? The Patriarch? –

LAY BROTHER He has precise  
 And certain knowledge, how and where, and in  
 What strength, and from which quarter, Saladin 640  
 Will open his campaign, if war breaks out  
 Again.

TEMPLAR He knows that?

LAY BROTHER Yes, and he would like  
 To let King Philip know about it too;  
 To enable him to calculate  
 How serious a danger there might be, 645  
 And judge if it is better to renew,  
 At any cost, the truce with Saladin  
 Which your courageous Order broke  
 So recently.

TEMPLAR Some Patriarch! – I see;  
 The dear brave man is asking me to be 650  
 Not just a messenger; he wants a spy! –  
 Good brother, kindly tell your Patriarch,  
 As far as you can sound me out, I am  
 The wrong man for this job. I am obliged  
 To look upon myself as prisoner. 655  
 The single duty of the Templar is  
 To wield his sword with valour on the battlefield,  
 Not espionage!

LAY BROTHER Just as I thought! –  
 And I can't blame you much for that, sir.  
 Yet the best is still to come. – The Patriarch 660  
 Has got to know the name, and the location,  
 Of the fortress in the Lebanon,<sup>33</sup>  
 Where those enormous sums are stored, which  
 Saladin's far-sighted father uses  
 To finance the army and equipment 665  
 For the war. Now, Saladin from time  
 To time visits this fortress, travelling  
 Along deserted roads with little escort –  
 You're with me?

<sup>33</sup> The German text refers to Mount Lebanon.



**TEMPLAR**                      Never that!

LAY BROTHER                      What could be  
Simpler? All you have to do is capture                      670  
Saladin, And make an end of him.  
You shudder? But already there are two  
God-fearing Maronites<sup>34</sup> who have prepared  
To risk the deed; they only need a trusty  
Man to lead them there.

[illegible]

LAY BROTHER He thinks likely, from a base in Acre<sup>35</sup>  
King Philip would be better able to  
Assist our cause.

TEMPLAR                      You ask me this? Me?

Did you not hear me, brother, when I told                      680

You what a debt of gratitude I owe

To Saladin?

LAY BROTHER                      Indeed I heard.

TEMPLAR And yet?

LAY BROTHER The Patriarch says, That's all very well:  
But God and the Order

TEMPLAR                      They change nothing! They  
Can't order me to villainy!

LAY BROTHER                      No.                      685

But – says the Patriarch – what's Villainy  
To human eyes may not be villainy to God.

TEMPLAR      I owe my life to Saladin. And now  
I should take his?

LAY BROTHER                      But, says the Patriarch,  
Saladin is still an enemy  
Of Christianity who cannot ever  
Earn the right to be your friend.

690

TEMPLAR My friend?  
Because I cannot be a villain to him?  
An ungrateful villain?

<sup>34</sup> Maronites were members of the Syrian Christian Church, since 1181 associated with the Roman Church.

<sup>35</sup> Acre was conquered by Saladin in 1187, and besieged for three years by the Crusaders.







<sup>36</sup> Emperor Frederick I (1121–90) (Frederick Barbarossa) drowned in the river Saleph in Armenia in 1190.

<sup>36</sup> Emperor Frederick I (1121–90) (Frederick Barbarossa) drowned in the river Saleph in Armenia in 1190.



TEMPLAR

Yes, a Swiss

By birth, who was vouchsafed the honour and  
The privilege of drowning in a river  
With his Imperial Majesty – Yes, woman!  
How often have you told me this before?  
How much longer will you persecute me?

760

DAJA

Persecute? Dear God!

TEMPLAR

Yes, persecute.

I refuse to see or hear you any  
More. I will not be reminded constantly  
Of something which I did without a thought  
And which remains a mystery to me  
When I think about it. Not that I  
Am anxious to regret it. But you see,  
Should such a thing occur again, you'd be  
To blame, if I were not so quick to act,  
If I asked questions first, and left to burn  
Whatever was in the flames.

765

770

DAJA

God save us!

TEMPLAR

From

Now on, do me the favour of ignoring  
Me. That's all I ask. And get the father  
Off my back. A Jew's a Jew. And I'm  
A blunt young Swabian.<sup>37</sup> The image of  
The girl has long since left my mind, if ever  
It was there.

775

DAJA

But yours still lives in hers.

780

TEMPLAR

What good can come of it? What good?

DAJA

Who knows?

People are not always what they seem.

TEMPLAR

But seldom any better. *(He walks away)*

DAJA

Wait! Why do

You rush away?

TEMPLAR

Woman, don't make me hate  
These palm trees, in whose shade I've often walked.

785

DAJA

Go away, you German bear, just go –  
But I must not lose track of this wild beast.  
*(She follows him at a distance)*

<sup>37</sup> Swabia is in south-west Germany.



**Act II****Scene 1**

Saladin and Sittah

*(Scene: The Sultan's Palace. Saladin and Sittah are playing chess)*

SITTAH Saladin, wake up! What's happened to your game?

SALADIN No good? I thought it was.

SITTAH Not even for me.

Take that move back again.

SALADIN But why?

SITTAH Your knight 790

Is unprotected.

SALADIN Oh True. There then!

SITTAH Now I can

Play a fork.<sup>38</sup>

SALADIN That's true again, so check!<sup>39</sup>

SITTAH What good is that? I now move out; and you  
Are as you were.

SALADIN I see I'm in a trap  
I can't escape without some sacrifice. 795  
Oh well! Just take the knight.

SITTAH I don't want him  
I shall go past.

SALADIN That gives me nothing. For  
Your strategy involves more than my knight.

SITTAH Maybe.

SALADIN Don't start counting chickens before  
They're hatched. There now! How's that? That's not what you 800  
Expected?

SITTAH No of course. How could I have  
Expected that you'd grown so tired of  
Your queen?

SALADIN Tired of my queen, you say?

<sup>38</sup> A move in which one chess piece threatens two opposing ones.

<sup>39</sup> A threat to take the King.



- SITTAH I see. Today I'll only win my thousand  
Dinars.<sup>40</sup> Not a single Nasarin<sup>41</sup> more. 805
- SALADIN How so?
- SITTAH How can you ask? Because you're trying  
To lose, with all your might. But my account  
Does not gain anything. Besides the fact  
That there's no pleasure in a game like this,  
Have I not always won more from you when 810  
I lost? When I have lost a game, you always  
Have consoled me afterwards by paying  
Double what you really owe me.
- SALADIN I see. So now I've beaten you it's *you* who's  
Lost the game on purpose, little sister? 815
- SITTAH At least, dear little brother, it may be  
That we should blame your generosity  
If I've not learned to play chess any better.
- SALADIN But we neglect our game. Let's finish it.
- SITTAH As you were? Check! And double check! 820
- SALADIN I admit I never noticed this  
Discovered check, which also takes away  
My queen.
- SITTAH Could you have stopped it happening?  
Let's see.
- SALADIN No, no; just take the queen away.  
I wasn't really happy with this piece. 825
- SITTAH Just with that piece?
- SALADIN Away with it! It doesn't  
Matter. Every piece is covered once  
Again.
- SITTAH My brother has instructed me  
Too well how courteously one must behave  
To queens.<sup>42</sup> (*She leaves the piece*)
- SALADIN Then take it or don't take it! It's 830  
The only one I have.

<sup>40</sup> A Dinar was an Arabian gold coin.

<sup>41</sup> A Nasarin was a small silver coin.

<sup>42</sup> Saladin had allowed Queen Sybille to visit her captured husband, Guy de Lusignan, King of Jerusalem.



SITTAH No need to take it.

# Check! Check!

SALADIN                      Go on then.

SITTAH Check! and check! and check!

## SALADIN Checkmate!

SITTAH Not quite; your knight can move between  
Them; or whatever else you like. It won't  
Make any difference.

SALADIN Quite right, You've won: 835

Al-Hafi pays. Let him be called! At once!  
Sittah, you weren't far wrong; I wasn't concentrating  
On the game: I was preoccupied.  
And who keeps giving us this set of faceless  
Pieces?<sup>43</sup> One can't memorize them, they are  
Characterless. Have I been playing against  
The Imam?<sup>44</sup> But a loss must seek excuses.  
I admit the shapeless pieces didn't  
Make me lose; it was your skill, the greater  
Calm and sharpness of your judgement ...

SITTAH Now 845

You want to blunt the sting of your defeat.  
It's just that you were more preoccupied  
Than even I was.

SALADIN                      What preoccupied *your* mind?

SITTAH      Not your preoccupation! Saladin,  
When shall we have a serious game again? 850

SALADIN    We'll play it yet more keenly when we do!  
                   You mean because the war restarts? Let it!  
                   I was not the first to take up arms;  
                   I wish we could extend the truce again.  
                   And at the same time I'd have liked so much  
                   To give my Sittah a good husband  
                   This must be Richard's<sup>45</sup> brother;<sup>46</sup> after all  
                   He is *Richard's* brother.

<sup>43</sup> The Koran forbids the use of images, so that strict Muslims would play with marked stones.

<sup>44</sup> The Imam, as the leader in a mosque, would be strict on this point.

<sup>45</sup> Richard I (1157–99) (Coeur de Lion).

<sup>46</sup> Prince John, later King John (1166–1216).







Let it go. In order not to lose 895  
 The advantage of the knight, they play the monk,  
 The foolish monk. And they could hardly wait  
 Until the ending of the armistice  
 To try their luck with a surprise attack.  
 How splendid! Carry on dear gentlemen, 900  
 Just carry on! It's all the same to me.  
 If only other things went as they ought.

SITTAH Oh?  
 What else has disconcerted you? What else  
 Has put you out of humour so?

SALADIN The same 905  
 That always put me out of humour in  
 The past. I was in Lebanon with father.  
 He is overwhelmed with problems.

SITTAH Oh dear!

SALADIN He cannot cope; he's hemmed in everywhere,  
 He lacks so much.

SITTAH Hemmed in? What does he lack?

SALADIN What I cannot bring myself to name, 910  
 Which, when I have it, seems superfluous,  
 And if I don't, seems indispensable.  
 Where is Al-Hafi then? Has no one gone  
 To find him? Wretched and accursed money!  
 Hafi! Good! I'm glad you're here.

## Scene 2

The dervish Al-Hafi, Saladin and Sittah

AL-HAFI The money 915  
 Has arrived from Egypt, I suppose.  
 I hope there's plenty of it.

SALADIN Have you news?

AL-HAFI I? 915  
 I haven't. I was thinking I'd receive  
 Some news from you.

SALADIN Pay Sittah a thousand  
 Dinars. (*Walking up and down thinking*)

AL-HAFI Pay instead of being paid! 920  
 Just fine! that's something even less than nothing.  
 To Sittah? once again to Sittah? And  
 You've lost? You have lost at chess again? Is this  
 The game here still?



- SITTAH At least you must admit  
My luck.
- AL-HAFI (*looking at the game*)  
Admit what? But surely you know ... 925
- SITTAH (*signals to him*)  
Sh! Hafi! Sh!
- AL-HAFI (*still looking at the game*)  
You're too quick off the mark!
- SITTAH Al-Hafi! Sh!
- AL-HAFI (*to Sittah*)  
So you were playing white?  
And you called check?
- SITTAH He hasn't heard, thank God.
- AL-HAFI Now it's his move?
- SITTAH (*going up to him*)  
Just say to Saladin  
That I can have my money.
- AL-HAFI (*still absorbed by the game*)  
Yes, of course 930  
You shall receive it, as you always do.
- SITTAH What, are you mad?
- AL-HAFI The game's not over yet.  
You really haven't lost it, Saladin.
- SALADIN (*hardly listening*)  
Just pay! Just Pay!
- AL-HAFI Pay! Pay!  
Your queen is still in place.
- SALADIN (*as before*)  
It makes no odds; 935  
It isn't in the game now.
- SITTAH Oh come on!  
Just say that I can have the money now.
- AL-HAFI (*still absorbed by the game*)  
That's understood, as usual – All the same,  
Even if the queen is not in play, it's  
Not yet checkmate.
- SALADIN (*steps forward and overthrows the board*)  
Yes it is. That's how 940  
I want it.
- AL-HAFI Yes, your game is like her winnings!  
Paid as it was won.



- SALADIN     *(to Sittah)*  
What's that he says?
- SITTAH     *(making signs to Al-Hafi from time to time)*  
You know him, how he bristles, likes to be  
Consulted, a bit envious perhaps.
- SALADIN     Surely not of you? Not of my sister?     945  
What's this, Al-Hafi? Envious? You?
- AL-HAFI     Perhaps,  
Perhaps! I think I'd rather have her brain;  
I'd rather be as good as her.
- SITTAH     But even  
So, he's always paid the right amount,  
And he will pay today as well. Just leave him!     950  
Go, Al-Hafi, go. I'll send out for  
The money later.
- AL-HAFI     No. I won't keep up  
This farce with you. He must be told the truth  
Sometime.
- SALADIN     Who? Told what truth?
- SITTAH     Al-Hafi!  
Is this your promise? Do you keep your word     955  
To me like this?
- AL-HAFI     How could I know, that it  
Would go so far.
- SALADIN     And am I to be told  
Nothing?
- SITTAH     Al-Hafi, do please be discreet.
- SALADIN     But this is very strange. Just what could Sittah  
Want to beg so solemnly and fervently     960  
From a foreigner, and from a dervish,  
Rather than from me, from her own brother.  
Al-Hafi, I command you now. Speak, dervish.
- SITTAH     Brother, don't let a trifle of this kind  
Concern you more than it deserves.     965  
You know, that several times I've won the same  
Amount from you when we played chess. Well then,  
Because I have no urgent need of it,  
And as the funds in Hafi's coffers aren't  
Exactly overflowing, just because     970  
Of this, the sums have not been paid. Don't worry,  
I'm not intending to donate them to you,  
Brother, nor to Hafi, nor the coffers.
- AL-HAFI     Yes, but that's not all!







Achieve? One horse, one coat, one sword, I still  
Must have. And I can't gain by bargaining  
With God. For he asks very little of  
Me – just my heart. All I was counting on  
Was any surplus from your treasury,  
Al-Hafi.

1010

AL-HAFI

Surplus? Tell me, would you not  
Have had me run-through, or at least have had  
Me strangled, if you had discovered that  
I had been holding back a surplus. No  
I'd rather risk embezzlement than that.

1015

SALADIN

But what are we to do then? Could you not  
Have borrowed first from someone else instead  
of Sittah?

SITTAH

Do you think I'd let him take  
This privilege away from me, my brother?  
And I still insist on it. I'm not  
Quite bankrupt yet.

1020

SALADIN

Not quite? That's the last straw!  
Go off at once, Al-Hafi, make a start.  
Take from anyone you can; and how you can.  
Go, borrow, promise. But don't borrow from  
The people I made rich. For borrowing  
From them might seem like taking back a gift.  
Go to the greatest misers; they're the ones  
Who'll gladly lend to me. They understand  
How well their money prospers in my hands.

1025

AL-HAFI

I know no one like that.

SITTAH

It just occurs  
To me that I have heard, Al-Hafi, that  
Your friend has come back.

1030

AL-HAFI

*(disconcerted)*

Friend? My friend? And who  
Might that be?

SITTAH

The Jew you highly praised.

AL-HAFI

A Jew I praised? And highly?

SITTAH

To whom God –  
I still remember clearly the expression  
Which you used about him once – to whom  
His God has granted both the smallest and  
The greatest of the treasures of this world  
In full measure.

1035



- AL-HAFI                      Did I say that? What did  
I mean by that?
- SITTAH                      The smallest riches. And                      1040  
The greatest wisdom.
- AL-HAFI                      What? About a Jew?  
Could I have said all that about a Jew?
- SITTAH                      You said of your Nathan, didn't you?
- AL-HAFI                      Oh yes! Of him! Of Nathan! He just didn't  
Spring to mind. So is it really true?                      1045  
He's come back home again at last? Well! He  
Cannot be badly off in that case. You're  
Quite right: the people once called him 'the Wise',  
'The Rich' as well.
- SITTAH                      'The Rich' now, even more                      1050  
Than ever. All the town resounds with talk  
Of all the precious things, the treasures he  
Has brought back.
- AL-HAFI                      Well, if he's 'the Rich' again,  
He's probably 'the Wise' again as well.
- SITTAH                      Al-Hafi, do you think you could approach him?
- AL-HAFI                      But for what? You can't mean for a loan?                      1055  
You don't know him. He won't lend. His wisdom  
Is that he will never lend to anyone.
- SITTAH                      But you gave me quite a different view  
Of him before.
- AL-HAFI                      If necessary, he                      1060  
Will lend you goods. But money? Never, No  
He's quite unlike the usual kind of Jew.  
He possesses understanding, he's  
Well mannered, plays good chess. But he stands out  
Among all other Jews in bad ways just  
As much as good. You really cannot count                      1065  
On him. He certainly gives money to  
The poor, perhaps as much as Saladin,  
Or if not quite as much, as willingly.  
Without discrimination too; Jew, Christian,  
Muslim, Parsee,<sup>49</sup> they are all alike                      1070  
To him.

---

<sup>49</sup> Parsee – Indian follower of Zoroaster, founder of the Persian cult of fire.



- SITTAH                    And such a man ...
- SALADIN                                    How can it be  
That I have never heard about this man?
- SITTAH                    Would he refuse to lend to Saladin,  
Who needs it on behalf of others, not  
Himself?
- AL-HAFI                    But here you see the Jew again,                    1075  
The common Jew. Believe me, he is jealous  
Of your generosity. He envies  
You! In all the world, when ever someone  
Says 'God reward you', he would like it to  
Be said to him. That's why he doesn't lend,                    1080  
So that he always has enough to give.  
Because his law<sup>50</sup> commands him to be charitable,  
But does not order him to be obliging.  
Charity makes him the least obliging  
Fellow in the world. For quite a while now                    1085  
My relations with him have been somewhat  
Strained. But just because of that, you mustn't  
Ever think that I don't do him justice.  
He is good for everything, except for this;  
For this he really is no good. I'll go                    1090  
And knock on other doors at once. I know  
A Moor, I've just remembered, who is rich  
And miserly, I'll go. I'll go and see him.
- SITTAH                    What's the hurry, -Hafi?
- SALADIN                                    Let him go!

### Scene 3

Sittah and Saladin

- SITTAH                    He's rushing off as if he's glad to get                    1095  
Away from me. Why? Has he been deceived  
By Nathan, or are we the ones he wishes to  
Deceive?
- SALADIN                    Why do you ask me? I hardly know  
Who you were talking of. Until today  
I never heard a thing about this Jew                    1100  
Of yours, this Nathan.
- SITTAH                    Can it be that such  
A man is still unknown to you? They say  
He has explored the tombs of Solomon

<sup>50</sup> The Mosaic law.



- And David,<sup>51</sup> and he knows a mighty magic  
Word with which he can remove their seals. 1105  
From them he brings out to the light of day  
From time to time those untold riches which  
Could not have come from any other source.
- SALADIN If this man took his riches out of tombs  
They certainly were not from Solomon's 1110  
or David's tombs. Fools must be buried there!
- SITTAH Or scoundrels! And in any case  
His source of riches is more fruitful, and  
More inexhaustible, than a mere tomb,  
Full of Mammon.<sup>52</sup>
- SALADIN He's a merchant then. 1115
- SITTAH His camels travel on all roads, and go  
Across all deserts. Nathan's ships are to  
Be found in every harbour. I was told that  
By Al-Hafi. And he added with  
Delight how great and noble was the use 1120  
His friend made of the wealth which he acquired  
With skill and energy. How nothing was  
Too small, how free his mind was from all prejudice,  
How open was his heart to every virtue,  
And how he was attuned to every beauty. 1125
- SALADIN But Al-Hafi spoke of him so coldly, so  
Uncertainly.
- SITTAH Not coldly, more embarrassed,  
As if he thought it dangerous to praise him,  
But did not want to be unjustly critical.  
Or could it be that, even though he is 1130  
The best of all his people he cannot  
Help being one of them? Perhaps Al-Hafi  
Feels ashamed of him in this respect.  
Well, be that as it may. It doesn't matter  
If the Jew is more or less like other 1135  
Jews. He's rich, and that's enough for us.
- SALADIN But surely, sister, you do not intend  
To take what's his by force?
- SITTAH What do you mean  
By force? With fire and sword? Of course not. With

<sup>51</sup> A reference to a legend that treasures were buried in these graves.

<sup>52</sup> Mammon-riches.



The weak the only kind of force one needs 1140  
Is their own weakness. Now just come with me  
To hear a singer in my harem whom  
I purchased only yesterday. Perhaps  
Meanwhile I can work out a strategy  
I have for dealing with this Nathan. Come! 1145

#### Scene 4

Recha, Nathan and Daja

*(Scene: In front of Nathan's house, where it meets the palm trees. Recha and Nathan come out. Daja joins them.)*

RECHA Father, you have been so long. There's little 1146  
Chance of meeting him by now.

NATHAN Well, well;  
If we've missed him here, beneath the palms,  
We'll see him somewhere else. Be calm now. Look!  
Is that not Daja coming to us?

RECHA She 1150  
Will surely have lost sight of him by now.

NATHAN I doubt it.

RECHA Then she would be walking faster.

NATHAN Probably she hasn't seen us.

RECHA Now  
She's seen us.

NATHAN Look, she's coming twice as fast.  
So just calm down.

RECHA You wouldn't really want 1155  
A daughter who was calm at such a moment?  
Who did not want to know to whose good deed  
She owes her life? Her life which she loves only  
Because she owes it first of all to you.

NATHAN I wouldn't want you different from what 1160  
You are; not even if I understand  
That something new is stirring in your soul.

RECHA What, father?

NATHAN You ask me so shyly? That  
Which now develops in your inmost heart  
Is innocence and nature. Let it cause you 1165  
No distress. It causes none to me.  
But promise one thing to me; if your heart  
Declares itself more openly, don't hide  
Its wishes from me.



- RECHA I tremble at the very  
Thought that I might hide my heart from you. 1170
- NATHAN No more about this, it is settled now  
And for all time. But here is Daja. Well?
- DAJA He's still here, walking in the palm-grove. Soon  
He'll come out from behind that wall. Look,  
Here he comes!
- RECHA Ah! He looks undecided. 1175  
Where now? Further on? Or back? Or to the right?  
Or left?
- DAJA No, no. He's sure to take a few more turns  
Around the monastery. And after that,  
I'm sure he'll pass us here.
- RECHA That's right! But did  
You speak to him? How did he seem?
- DAJA As always. 1180
- NATHAN Make sure he doesn't know that you are here.  
Go further back. Or better still go right  
Inside.
- RECHA Just one more look! Oh, no, the hedge  
Is hiding him from me.
- DAJA Come on. Your father  
Is quite right. If he should see you, he 1185  
Might turn back straight away.
- RECHA That hedge again!
- NATHAN And if he comes out from behind it suddenly,  
He is bound to see you. He can't help it. So  
Hurry, go!
- DAJA Come on; I know a window  
Where we can see what they are doing.
- RECHA Yes? 1190  
(Both go inside)

### Scene 5

Nathan soon joined by the Templar

- NATHAN I'm almost frightened of this strange young man.  
His rugged virtue almost makes me hesitate.  
But how can one man make another feel  
So ill at ease? Ah! Here he comes. By God,  
He's certainly a manly youth. I like 1195



His good, defiant look, and his firm step.  
However bitter is his shell, the kernel  
Cannot be. Where have I seen his like?  
Forgive me, noble Frank.

TEMPLAR What?

NATHAN Please allow me.

TEMPLAR What, Jew, what?

NATHAN To venture to address you. 1200

TEMPLAR How can I prevent it? But you'd better  
Make it short.

NATHAN Please wait. Don't rush away  
So proudly and contemptuously from  
A man who is forever in your debt.

TEMPLAR How's that? Ah, I believe I know. You are ... 1205

NATHAN My name is Nathan. I'm the father of  
The girl you generously rescued from  
The fire. I've come ...

TEMPLAR To thank me? But I have  
Already had to suffer too much thanks  
For this mere trifle. As for you, you owe 1210  
Me nothing. After all I did not know  
That this girl was your daughter. And it is  
The duty of the Templar Knights to spring  
To the assistance of all people in  
Distress. In any case my life was at 1215  
That moment burdensome to me. So I  
Was very glad to seize the opportunity  
To put my life at risk to save another.  
Even if the life I saved might be  
As unimportant as this Jewish girl's. 1220

NATHAN A great and dreadful thing! I think  
I understand. Your modest greatness hides  
Behind such dreadful words in order  
To escape from admiration. All the same  
If admiration meets with your contempt 1225  
What can we offer that you would find less  
Despicable? Sir, if you weren't a stranger  
Here, a prisoner, I would not be  
So bold in asking you. Give your command:  
How can we serve you?

TEMPLAR You? with nothing.



- NATHAN I'm 1230  
A man with riches.
- TEMPLAR But a richer Jew  
Is not a better Jew to me.
- NATHAN But even so  
Could you not make use of all the good  
Things which he has? Could you not use his riches?
- TEMPLAR Well, I won't reject that out of hand, 1235  
If only for the sake of my old cloak.  
As soon as it wears out, and neither seam  
Nor tatter holds together any longer,  
Then I'll borrow cloth or money from you  
For a new one. But don't look so black! 1240  
You're still quite safe. It isn't that far gone.  
You can see it's still in quite good  
Condition. Only this one corner has  
An ugly mark: that's where it has been singed.  
That happened when I carried out your daughter 1245  
Through the fire.
- NATHAN *(takes hold of the corner of the cloth and looks at it)*  
How strange it is that such  
An evil stain, the mark of fire, should give  
A man a better testimonial  
Than his own mouth. And I would like to kiss  
This mark. Ah! Pardon me! I couldn't help it.
- TEMPLAR What?
- NATHAN A tear fell on it.
- TEMPLAR Never mind.  
There have been many drops before. (This Jew  
Is disconcerting.)
- NATHAN I wonder if you would  
Be very kind and let your cloak be taken  
Some time to my daughter?
- TEMPLAR For what reason? 1255
- NATHAN So she may press her lips upon this mark.  
For I suppose her wish to fall upon  
Her knees in front of you is now in vain.
- TEMPLAR But Jew, – your name is Nathan? Nathan then,  
You frame your words with skill, and very pointedly 1260  
I am embarrassed – anyway – I would ...
- NATHAN React and play a part, just as you wish.



- I'll still see through it. You were far too good  
And honest to be more polite. The girl  
Was all emotion; while the woman messenger 1265  
Was too insistent, and the father, far  
Away. You were concerned for her good name.  
You fled, to save her from an ordeal or defeat.  
I thank you for that too.
- TEMPLAR I see you know  
The way in which we Templars ought to think. 1270
- NATHAN Why only Templars? And why *ought* to think?  
Because it is commanded by the Order?  
I know how all good people think, and that  
Good people are produced in every land.
- TEMPLAR And yet, I hope, with differences.
- NATHAN Of course 1275  
They're different in colour, dress, and build.
- TEMPLAR In one place more, and in another less.
- NATHAN These differences don't amount to much.  
Everywhere a great man needs much space,  
When several are planted close together 1280  
They just break each others' branches. Average  
Men like us are countless everywhere.  
And yet each one must tolerate the rest,  
And yet one gnarled branch must accept another.  
And yet no single treetop must presume 1285  
That it alone did not spring from the ground.
- TEMPLAR Well spoken! But you also know the race  
Which first evolved this petty, carping view  
Of humankind? You know which people was  
The first to call itself the chosen people,<sup>53</sup> Nathan? 1290  
I don't exactly hate this people, but  
I cannot help despising them for all  
Their pride. Their pride, which they passed down to  
Christian and to Muslim, that their God alone  
Is the true God!. You are amazed that I, 1295  
A Christian and a Templar, speak like this?  
When and where has pious fury claimed  
More stridently to have the better God,  
And to impose it on the whole world as

<sup>53</sup> Deuteronomy 7:6. 'The Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself above all people that are upon the face of the earth.'



- The best? Where has it shown itself in blacker  
Form than here, and now? Can anybody,  
Here and now, be so blinkered ... Leave  
Them to their blindness! Just forget what I  
Have said, and let me be. (*He is about to go*) 1300
- NATHAN Ah, you don't know 1305  
How much more firmly I shall press myself  
Upon you now. We really must be friends.  
Despise my people if you wish. But neither  
Of us chose our people. Are we then  
Our people? What does 'people' mean?  
Are Jew and Christian, Jew and Christian first 1310  
And human beings second? Have I found  
In you a man who needs no other name  
Than human being?
- TEMPLAR Yes, by God, You're right!  
Nathan give me your hand. I am ashamed  
That I misjudged you even for a moment. 1315
- NATHAN I'm proud of it. For only common things  
Are recognised at once.
- TEMPLAR But what is rare  
Is harder to forget. Nathan, of course  
We must, we must be friends.
- NATHAN We are already. 1320  
How my Recha will rejoice at this!  
And what a joyful prospect opens up  
Before my eyes! Just get to know her first.
- TEMPLAR I already long to do so. Who is that  
Who rushes from your house. Is it not Daja?
- NATHAN Yes, and she looks anxious.
- TEMPLAR Let us hope 1325  
Our Recha is all right.

### Scene 6

Nathan, Templar and Daja

- DAJA Nathan, Nathan!
- NATHAN Well?
- DAJA Forgive me, noble knight, for interrupting  
You.
- NATHAN What is it?



- TEMPLAR Yes, what is it?
- DAJA The Sultan sends for you. The Sultan wants  
To speak to you. My God, the Sultan!
- NATHAN Me? 1330  
The Sultan? I expect he wants to see  
What new things I've brought back. Just tell him that  
Little – almost nothing – is unpacked.
- DAJA No, no, he won't see anything. He wants  
To speak to you in person, and as soon 1335  
As possible.
- NATHAN I'll come. Go in, go in!
- DAJA Please do not be offended, noble knight –  
God, we are so worried about what  
The Sultan wants.
- NATHAN We'll soon find out. Just go!

*Scene 7*

## Nathan and the Templar

- TEMPLAR So you don't know him yet? I mean in person? 1340
- NATHAN Saladin? Not yet. I've not avoided  
Meeting him, but never sought him out.  
The general report spoke so much good  
Of him that I preferred believing it  
To meeting him himself. But if it's true 1345  
That he, by granting you your life ...
- TEMPLAR Quite right.  
At least that's true. The life which I'm now living  
Is his gift.
- NATHAN And with this gift he's given  
Me a double, threefold life. It changes  
Everything between us. All at once 1350  
It threw a rope around me, so that I  
Am bound forever to his service, now.  
I can scarcely, scarcely wait to hear  
What he will first command me. I am ready  
To do anything. And I am ready 1355  
To admit I do it for your sake.
- TEMPLAR I've had no chance to thank him for myself yet,  
Even though I've often crossed his path.  
The impression which I made on him  
Came suddenly, and disappeared as fast. 1360



Who knows if he remembers me at all.  
 And yet he must remember me again.  
 Once more at least; for he must finally  
 Decide my fate. It's not enough that I  
 Still live at his command, and at his will. 1365  
 I now must learn from him according to  
 Whose will I have to live my life henceforth.

NATHAN Exactly; one more reason why I won't  
 Delay. Perhaps a word may give me a chance  
 To mention you. Forgive me, I must hurry. 1370  
 But when shall we see you at our house?

TEMPLAR As soon as you allow.

NATHAN Or you would like.

TEMPLAR Today then.

NATHAN And your name, if I may ask.

TEMPLAR My name was – is – Curd von Stauffen. Curd.

NATHAN Von Stauffen? – Stauffen? – Stauffen?

TEMPLAR Why are you 1375  
 So struck by that?

NATHAN Von Stauffen? – There must be  
 Some other families of that name ...

TEMPLAR Oh yes, there were  
 More of them – and some rot here to this day.  
 My uncle himself – my father, I should say –  
 Why are you looking at me more and more 1380  
 Intently?

NATHAN Nothing, nothing. It's just that  
 I cannot tire of seeing you.

TEMPLAR Then I  
 Shall leave you first. The eyes of one who seeks  
 Have often found more than he wished to find.  
 I fear them, Nathan. Let time, and not curiosity, 1385  
 Develop our acquaintance step by step. (*He goes out*)

NATHAN (*Looking after him in astonishment*)  
 'The eyes of one who seeks have often found  
 More than he wished to find'. It is as if  
 He read my mind. It really is. And yet  
 It could be possible. He has not only 1390  
 Wolf's build, Wolf's walk – his voice too is the same  
 Wolf even used to toss his head like that.



Wolf held his sword as he does, and like him  
 He also stroked his eyebrows with his hand,  
 As if to hide the fire in his eyes. 1395  
 How such images, so deeply etched,  
 Can sometimes sleep in us, until a single  
 Word, a sound, awakens them. Von Stauffen –  
 Right, that's right! Von Filnek and Von Stauffen.  
 Soon I'll find out more about that, soon, 1400  
 But first to Saladin. What's this? Is that  
 Not Daja lurking there? Come closer, Daja.

### Scene 8

Daja and Nathan

NATHAN I suppose that both of you are bursting to  
 Discover something very different from  
 Why the Sultan wants to see me.

DAJA Can 1405  
 You blame her? You had just begun to talk  
 To him more confidentially, when we  
 Were driven from the window by the Sultan's  
 Messenger.

NATHAN Just tell her then, she may  
 Expect him any moment.

DAJA Really? Really? 1410

NATHAN I hope I can rely upon you Daja?  
 Please be on your guard. You won't have any  
 Reason to regret it, and your conscience  
 Will be satisfied by this. But please  
 Do nothing to disrupt my plan. Just talk 1415  
 And ask your questions with discretion and  
 Restraint ...

DAJA I hardly need reminding of  
 That. I'm going; you must go yourself.  
 But look! I do believe a second messenger  
 Has come from Saladin, your dervish, Al-Hafi. (*Exit*) 1420

### Scene 9

Nathan and Al-Hafi

AL-HAFI There you are! It's you I've come to see.  
 NATHAN Why this urgency? What does he want  
 Of me?







Perhaps you might imagine that a man  
Who needs your money would consider taking  
Your advice? You really think so? Saladin  
Accept advice! When has he taken any  
Advice? You can't imagine, Nathan, what  
Occurred just now when I was with him. 1450

NATHAN Well? 1455

AL-HAFI I came to him just after he had played  
Chess with his sister. Sittah doesn't play  
So badly. And the game, which Saladin  
Believed he'd lost, and had conceded, was  
Still set out, untouched. I take a look, 1460  
And see the game is very far from lost.

NATHAN That must have been a lucky find for you!

AL-HAFI All that he had to do was to move the king  
Behind the pawn, and out of check. If I  
Could only show you!

NATHAN I believe you. 1465

AL-HAFI Then the rook was free to move – and she  
Was lost. I wanted to explain it to him.  
I called him. Guess what?

NATHAN And he disagreed?

AL-HAFI He wouldn't even listen, but with scorn  
He turned the whole game over.

NATHAN How could he? 1470

AL-HAFI He said he *wanted* to be checkmate anyway.  
He wanted to! You call that playing chess?

NATHAN No, playing *with* the game.

AL-HAFI And it was worth  
A pretty penny.

NATHAN Money, money, money!  
That's the least of it. But to refuse  
To listen to Al-Hafi, and to shut  
His ears to you on such a weighty point,  
Not to appreciate your eagle eye:  
That cries aloud for vengeance, does it not? 1475

AL-HAFI Now, now, I'm only telling you all this  
So you can see what sort of head he has. 1480  
In short, I cannot stand him any longer.  
So I've been chasing all the Moorish sharks  
And asking who will make a loan to him.



- I, who've never begged a penny for  
Myself, must borrow for another. Borrowing  
Is much the same as begging, just as lending  
For the interest is much the same  
As stealing. With my Ghebers<sup>54</sup> on the Ganges.  
I don't need either, and I need not be  
The tool of either. On the Ganges, on  
The Ganges, only there are human beings.  
You alone, of all those here, are worthy  
To live beside the Ganges. Will you come  
With me? Leave all your trash to him and let  
Him deal with it. He'll get it from you  
Anyway by degrees. This way you'll lose  
Your burden all at once. I'll get a delk<sup>55</sup>  
For you. Come on!
- NATHAN I think we'll always have  
This choice, Al-Hafi, but I want to think  
It over. Wait ...
- AL-HAFI What? Think about it?  
No thought is needed for a thing like this.
- NATHAN But only till I get back from the Sultan;  
Until I've said goodbye ...
- AL-HAFI Whoever thinks  
About it seeks excuses not to act.  
If he can't instantly decide to live  
Just for himself, he'll always be a slave  
To others. As you wish. Farewell. Just as  
You like. I'll go my way, you go yours.
- NATHAN Al-Hafi! You will put your own affairs  
In order first?
- AL-HAFI Oh nonsense! Any cash  
That's left is hardly worth the counting. My  
Accounts are guaranteed by you or Sittah.  
Farewell! *(Exit)*
- NATHAN *(looking after him)*  
I'll guarantee them. Wild, good, noble –  
How can I describe him? In the end,  
A real beggar is the only real king!  
*(Exit the other side.)*

<sup>54</sup> Ghebers – Persian name for followers of Zoroaster, also called Parsees (see Act II, Sc.2).

<sup>55</sup> delk – the Arabian name for the dervish dress.



### Act III

### Scene 1

Recha and Daja

*Scene: (in Nathan's house)*

RECHA      What was it, Daja, that my father said  
To us? “You can expect him any moment”.  
Don’t you think that sounds as if he will  
Arrive here very soon? How many moments  
Have already passed! – But then, why think  
Of vanished moments? All I want now is  
To live each passing moment as it comes.  
At last will come the one which brings him here.

DAJA            Curse that message from the Sultan! If  
                      It weren't for that I'm sure that Nathan would  
                      Have brought him right away.

RECHA

And when this moment  
Comes at last, and when it brings with it  
Fulfilment of the warmest and the deepest  
Of my wishes – what then? What then?

DAJA	What then?	1530
<p>Then I hope the warmest of <i>my</i> wishes          Will achieve fulfilment too.</p>		

RECHA                                But then what will  
Replace this wish within my heart? It has  
Forgotten how to feel unless it has  
One overpowering wish. Will there be – nothing?  
Oh, it frightens me!

1535

DAJA                      Then my own wish  
Will take the place of yours, once yours is satisfied –  
My wish to know that you will be in Europe  
In the care of people worthy of you.

RECHA      How wrong you are! The very reason which      1540  
Creates this wish in you prevents it ever  
Being mine. You feel the pull of your  
Own homeland. Should not *my* land hold me here?  
Why should a vision of your people, which  
Has not yet faded from your mind, have greater      1545  
Influence than people I can see,  
Touch, hear – *my* people?

Pointless to resist.

DAJA      The ways of Heaven are the ways of Heaven.  
And suppose your Templar were to be



The means by which his God, for whom he fights, 1550  
Intends to lead you to the land and to  
The people for whom you were born?

RECHA

O Daja!

What are you saying yet again, dear Daja!  
You really do have most peculiar  
Ideas! 'His God, *his* God for whom he fights.' 1555  
To whom does God belong? What sort of God  
Belongs to just one person? One who needs  
People to fight for him? And how can we  
Know which bit of earth we have been born for,  
Unless it is the one *on* which we have 1560  
Been born? If father were to hear you talk!  
What has he done to you that you must always  
See my happiness so far from him?  
What has he done to make you want to mix  
The seed of pure reason,<sup>56</sup> which he planted 1565  
In my soul, with weeds or flowers of  
Your homeland? Dear, beloved Daja, he  
Does not want your brightly coloured flowers  
In my soil now; and I have to tell you  
That however beautifully they 1570  
May cover it, I feel my soil has been  
So weakened, so impoverished by all  
Your flowers; in their scent, their sweet-sour scent  
I feel so dizzy and so numb. – Your brain  
Is more accustomed to this. I don't blame you 1575  
For your stronger nerves, which can endure it.  
But it's not for me. As for your "Angel" –  
Did it not so very nearly make a fool  
Of me? This nonsense makes me feel ashamed  
In front of my own father.

DAJA

Nonsense? – as if

1580

This place were blessed with reason! Nonsense!  
If only I could speak!

RECHA

Are you not free

To speak? Did I not always listen when  
You chose to talk to me about the heroes  
Of your own religion? Have I ever 1585  
Failed to admire their deeds, to shed tears gladly  
For their sufferings? It's true, I did not

<sup>56</sup> Matthew 13:24. 'The Kingdom of Heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field.'



Think their faith the most heroic quality  
 In them. What I found more consoling was  
 The lesson that devotedness to God 1590  
 Does not wholly depend on what  
 We speculate about him. Dear Daja,  
 My father has so often told us that;  
 And you have often said that you agreed  
 With him. So why do you now undermine 1595  
 Alone what you have built with him  
 Together? – Dear Daja, this is not the best  
 Discussion to be having while we're waiting  
 For our friend. For me, of course, it is.  
 To me it matters very much if he too ... 1600  
 Listen Daja! – Someone's at our door.  
 Suppose it's he! Just listen!

## Scene 2

Recha, Daja and the Templar

*(Someone has opened the door for the Templar with the words:)*

Come this way.

RECHA *(Starts, composes herself and is about to fall at his feet)*  
 It is he! – My saviour!

TEMPLAR It was to avoid this  
 That I did not come before. But –

RECHA At  
 The feet of this proud man, I just want, once 1605  
 Again, to thank God; not to thank the man.  
 The man does not want thanks; he wants them just  
 As little as the water pail which worked  
 So hard in putting out the fire. It let  
 Itself be filled and emptied with no thought 1610  
 For you or me. The man is like that too.  
 He too was simply thrust into the blaze;  
 And quite by chance I stayed there in his arms,  
 As if I were a spark upon his cloak. 1615  
 Until something – who knows what? – at last  
 Propelled us from the blaze. Is this a cause  
 For thanks? In Europe wine is capable  
 Of spurring men to every kind of deed.  
 It's just that Templars sometimes have to act 1620/1  
 Like this. Like rather well-trained dogs they must  
 Retrieve things out of fire or out of water.

TEMPLAR *(who has been watching her in uneasy astonishment)*  
 Oh Daja, Daja! Just because at moments



Of distress and bitterness my temper  
 May have given you offence, why did you pass on 1625  
 Every stupid word that I let slip?  
 Daja, your revenge on me was too severe!  
 I hope that from now on you'll represent  
 Me to her better.

DAJA But I think, sir, if  
 I'm right, that all these little stings which pricked 1630  
 Her heart will not have done you any harm  
 At all.

RECHA What? You were in distress? So then  
 You were more miserly with your distress  
 Than with your life.

TEMPLAR My good, sweet child! –  
 How much my soul is torn between my eyes 1635  
 And ears! – You can't have been the girl, no, no,  
 It cannot have been you I rescued from  
 The fire. For how could anyone who knew you  
 Not have saved you from the fire? Who would  
 Have waited for me? – Yet – fear changes things. 1640  
*(Pause while he seems lost in thought, looking at her)*

RECHA And yet I find that you are still the same –  
*(Pause, until she goes on, to stop him looking at her)*  
 Now, Sir, perhaps you'll tell us where you've been  
 So long? And I might also dare to ask –  
 Where are you now?

TEMPLAR I am – where I perhaps  
 Should not be.

RECHA Where were you before? Perhaps 1645  
 Again where you should not have been? That is  
 Not good.

TEMPLAR On – on – what is the mountain called?  
 On Sinai.

RECHA On Sinai? – Oh good!  
 At last I can find out for certain whether  
 It is true.

TEMPLAR What? Whether it is true 1650  
 That you can see there still the place where Moses  
 Stood before God,<sup>57</sup> where –

<sup>57</sup> Exodus 19:2–3. 'They were come unto the desert of Sinai ... and Moses went up unto God and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain.'



1685



TEMPLAR Oh no. He is expecting me to come,  
Not you. And he might easily – who knows? –  
He might easily at Saladin's –  
You don't know the Sultan – he might well  
Get into trouble. So there's danger if 1690  
I stay, believe me.

RECHA Danger? But what danger?

TEMPLAR Danger for me, for you, for him, if I  
Don't go this minute. (*Exit*)

### Scene 3

Recha and Daja

RECHA What has happened, Daja? –  
Why so quickly? What's come over him?  
Why's he rushing off?

DAJA Just let him go. 1695  
I think it's no bad sign.

RECHA A sign? Of what?

DAJA That something's going on inside him. It  
Is simmering, but it must not boil over.  
Leave him. Now it's your turn.

RECHA My turn? You  
Are as mysterious as he is.

DAJA Soon 1700  
You will be able to repay him for  
The unrest which he caused you. But you won't  
Be too severe, too full of thoughts of vengeance?

RECHA I suppose you know exactly what you mean.

DAJA Have you calmed down so much already. Recha? 1705

RECHA Yes, I have, I have ...

DAJA At least admit  
To me that you are pleased by his unrest.  
The calmness which you now enjoy is owed  
To his unrest.

RECHA I'm not aware of that. 1710  
The most I can admit to you is that  
It does seem very strange to me to find  
That such a storm within my heart should be  
So quickly followed by such stillness. Now  
His whole appearance, and his speech, his tone,  
Have ...

DAJA Satisfied you straight away?



- RECHA I won't 1715  
 Say satisfied – no – not by a long way –
- DAJA Only calmed the burning hunger.
- RECHA Yes,  
 You could say that.
- DAJA But I don't.
- RECHA I shall  
 Always treasure him, more dearly than  
 My life; although my pulse no longer races 1720  
 When I hear his name, although my heart  
 No longer beats with greater speed and vigour  
 When I think of him. But why this chatter?  
 Come, dear Daja, come back to the window  
 Which looks out on to the palms.
- DAJA Your burning 1725  
 Hunger is not yet entirely stilled.
- RECHA Now I shall see the palms again, not just  
 The man who walks beneath them.
- DAJA But this coldness  
 May be just the start of a new fever.
- RECHA What coldness? I'm not cold. Truly I see 1730  
 With no less pleasure what I can see calmly.

*Scene 4*

Saladin and Sittah

*(Scene: An audience room in the Sultan's palace)*

- SALADIN *(as he comes in, standing by the door)*  
 Bring the Jew in here when he arrives.  
 He doesn't seem to be in any haste.
- SITTAH Perhaps he was not there, could not be found  
 At once.
- SALADIN Oh Sister! Sister!
- SITTAH You behave 1735  
 As if you're ready for a battle.
- SALADIN One  
 With weapons which I have not learned to use.  
 To play a part, to make someone afraid,  
 Set traps for him, to lead him on thin ice.  
 When could I do that? When ever did 1740  
 I learn to do it? What is it all for?  
 What for? To fish for money! Just for money,  
 To scare a Jew and make him give me money!



For that I'm to resort to petty tricks,  
All for the sake of the most trivial  
Of trifles? 1745

SITTAH                      Every trifle takes revenge  
If you despise it, brother.

SALADIN                      Sad, but true.  
Suppose this Jew should really be the good  
And reasonable man described to you  
By Al-Hafi recently.

SITTAH                      And if he is? 1750

There's no need for trickery. The snare  
Is for a Jew who's anxious, miserly  
And fearful, not for such a good, wise man.  
He's already ours without the snare.  
And there's some pleasure in observing how 1755  
A man like that can extricate himself.  
Whether he can quickly tear the rope  
Apart with his audacious strength, or how  
He will manoeuvre cunningly to wriggle  
Past the net; this is a pleasure which 1760  
You'll have in any case.

SALADIN                      That's true. Of course  
I'm looking forward to it.

SITTAH                      So there's nothing else  
To worry you at all. For if he's just  
Like all the others, if he's no more than  
A Jew, like any other Jew, you need not 1765  
Be ashamed of seeming just as he  
Thinks all men are. Besides in his eyes someone  
Who appears to be a better man  
Is just an ass, a fool.

SALADIN                      And so my bad  
Behaviour will prevent a bad man thinking 1770  
Badly of me?

SITTAH                      If you call it bad,  
To use a thing according to its nature.

SALADIN                      You women always make your wily plans  
Seem better than they are.

SITTAH                      What do you mean?

SALADIN                      But I'm afraid my clumsy hands will break 1775  
So fine and delicate a scheme. It must  
Be executed as it was conceived:  
With cunning and dexterity. However



That may be, I'll dance as best I can,  
And I would rather do it worse than better. 1780

SITTAH Do not underestimate yourself!  
I know you'll win, if only you're determined.  
Men like you would so much like to make  
Us think that your success in life depends  
Upon your sword, your sword and nothing else. 1785  
When he goes hunting with the fox, the lion  
Is ashamed – but of the fox, not of  
His cunning.

SALADIN And a woman always likes  
To drag men to her level! Leave me now.  
I think I've learned my lesson well enough. 1790

SITTAH What? Must I go?

SALADIN Did you intend to stay?

SITTAH If not to stay – at least where I can see –  
Here in the ante-room.

SALADIN To eavesdrop there?  
Not even that, my sister, if I'm to  
Succeed. Now go! The curtain rustles; here 1795  
He comes! Don't linger there. I shall be watching.

*(While she goes through one door, Nathan comes in the other and  
Saladin has sat down)*

### Scene 5

Saladin and Nathan

SALADIN Come closer, Jew – closer – right up to me.  
Don't be afraid.

NATHAN That's for your enemies!

SALADIN You call yourself Nathan?

NATHAN Yes.

SALADIN The wise Nathan?

NATHAN No.

SALADIN You may not; but the people do. 1800

NATHAN The people! Possibly.

SALADIN You surely don't  
Believe that I despise the people's voice?  
For some time now I've wished to meet the man  
Whom all the people call the Wise.

NATHAN And if  
They call him that in mockery? If wise 1805



- Means to the people nothing more than shrewd,  
And shrewd just means aware of his own interest.
- SALADIN You mean his own *true* interest, I presume?
- NATHAN Then the most selfish man would be the shrewdest.  
Then shrewd and wise would be the same.
- SALADIN I hear 1810  
You proving what you wish to contradict.  
Humanity's true interest, which the people  
Cannot understand, *you* understand.  
At least you've tried to understand it.  
You have reflected on it. That alone 1815  
Makes a man wise.
- NATHAN But everybody thinks  
He's wise.
- SALADIN That's quite enough of modesty!  
To hear this all the time when what I seek  
For is sober reason fills me with disgust.  
(*He gets up quickly*)  
Now let's come straight to the point. But, first of all 1820  
Be honest with me, Jew! Be honest!
- NATHAN Sultan  
You can rely on me. I'll serve you, and  
Prove worthy of your further patronage.
- SALADIN You'll serve me? How?
- NATHAN I promise you the best  
Of everything, and at the cheapest price. 1825
- SALADIN What are you talking about? Surely not  
About your goods? My sister may well haggle  
With you sometime. (That's in case she's listening!)  
I have no business with you as a merchant.
- NATHAN In that case, I expect you want to know 1830  
What news about the enemy I gathered  
On my travels. It is true the enemy  
Is active once again, and to be frank ...
- SALADIN No, that was not my aim in meeting you.  
I know already everything I need 1835  
To know of that. – In short –
- NATHAN Command me, Sultan.
- SALADIN I want your teaching on another subject.  
Something quite different. Since you are so wise,  
Tell me, what kind of faith, what kind of law  
Has seemed most plausible to you?



NATHAN	Sultan,	1840/1
	I am a Jew.	
SALADIN	And I a Muslim. And	
	The Christian is between us. Of these three	
	Religions only one can be the true one.	
	A man like you does not remain, where chance	1845
	Of birth has cast him: if he does, he stays	
	From insight, reason, choice of what is best.	
	So, share with me your insight. Let me hear	
	The reasons which I haven't had the time	
	To ponder for myself. Tell me the choice	1850
	Determined by these reasons – in the strictest	
	Confidence, you understand – so I	
	Can make that choice my own. I see you hesitate.	
	You look me up and down. It may well be	
	That no Sultan has ever had this kind	1855
	Of whim before. And yet it does not seem	
	Unworthy of a Sultan. Do you think?	1857/8
	Speak! – or do you want a moment to	1859/60
	Collect your thoughts? Very well, you may.	
	(I'll go and see if Sittah's listening	
	And hear if I've done it right.) Now think!	
	Think quickly. And I'll soon be back.	
	<i>(He goes into the ante-room where Sittah went)</i>	

### Scene 6

Nathan

*(Nathan alone)*

NATHAN	How strange!	1865
	How do I stand? What does the Sultan want?	
	I come expecting money. And he wants	
	The truth. The truth! and wants it so – straight out.	
	In cash, – as if it were a coin! If it	
	Were ancient coinage, valued by its weight –	1870
	That might have passed. But such new kinds of coin	
	Valued by their stamp, which you must count	
	Out on a board, are not like truth at all.	
	Can truth be counted out into our heads	
	Like money in a sack? Now who's the Jew? –	1875
	He or I? And yet I wonder. Is	
	He truly searching for the truth at all?	
	Should I suspect that he is only using	
	Truth to trap me? That would be too petty.	
	Too petty? Nothing is too petty for	1880
	A great man. And, of course he rushed right in,	



Like someone bursting through the door. But when  
 You're visiting a friend, you knock and listen  
 First. I must be on my guard. But how?  
 I can't insist that I'm a Jew; but to  
 Deny that I'm a Jew would be still worse.  
 Then he could simply ask, "If not a Jew,  
 Why not a Muslim?" That's it! That can save me!  
 It's not just children who can be fobbed off  
 With fairy tales. He's coming. Let him come!

1885

1890

*Scene 7*

Saladin and Nathan

SALADIN (And so the coast is clear) – I hope I've given  
 You enough time for reflection. Have  
 You finished ordering your thoughts? Speak!  
 Not a soul can hear us.

NATHAN I don't mind  
 If the whole world were to hear us.

SALADIN Nathan  
 Is so certain of his case? That's what I call  
 A wise man! One who never hides the truth.  
 A man who, for its sake, will gamble everything  
 His blood and land, life and limb.

1895

NATHAN Yes, if it's needed and of use.

SALADIN I hope  
 I may in future earn the right to bear  
 One of my titles: "The Reformer of the World  
 And of the Law."

1900

NATHAN A truly splendid title!  
 But before I tell you all my thoughts,  
 Sultan, would you allow me to relate  
 A little tale?

1905

SALADIN Why not? I've always loved  
 To listen to a story, if it is  
 Well told.

NATHAN I must confess I'm not the man  
 To tell it very well.

SALADIN Your pride and modesty  
 Again! Go on, just tell the story, now.

1910

NATHAN Once long ago, a man lived in the East  
 Who had a ring of priceless worth, a gift



From someone dear to him. The stone was opal,  
 Shot through with a hundred lovely colours.  
 The ring had secret power to gain favour<sup>58</sup> 1915  
 In the sight of God and humankind<sup>59</sup>  
 For anyone who wore it and who trusted  
 In its power. No wonder that the man  
 Would never take it from his finger; and  
 He made provision that the ring should stay 1920  
 Forever in his dynasty. And so  
 He left it to the dearest of his sons,  
 With firm instructions that he, in his turn,  
 Should leave it to the son he loved the most.  
 In this way, by the power of the ring, 1925  
 Without respect of birth, the dearest son  
 Should always be the master of the house.  
 You understand me, Sultan?

SALADIN Yes, go on!

NATHAN And so the ring passed down from son to son,  
 Until it reached a father of three sons. 1930  
 All three alike were dutiful to him.  
 And he was therefore bound to love all three  
 Sons equally. And yet, from time to time,  
 When each in turn was with him on his own,  
 And did not have to share his overflowing heart 1935  
 With his two brothers, then the one who stood  
 Before him seemed most worthy of the ring.  
 And thus by loving weakness he was led  
 To promise it to each of them in turn.  
 So matters rested for a while, until 1940  
 The father's death drew near; and then the worthy  
 Man was in a quandary. He could  
 Not bear to hurt two of his sons, who'd trusted  
 In his word. So what was he to do?  
 He sent in secret for a craftsman who 1945  
 Was ordered to devise two further rings,  
 Exactly on the pattern of his own,  
 Whatever cost or effort was required,  
 To make each ring precisely like the first.  
 The craftsman did well. When he brought the rings 1950

<sup>58</sup> Luke 2:52. 'And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man.'

<sup>59</sup> (and I Samuel 2:26).







- SALADIN (Upon my life! The man is right.  
I must be silent.)
- NATHAN Let us now come back  
To our three rings. I said before: the sons  
Accused each other, each swore to the judge  
He had received his ring directly from 1995  
His father's hand – and it was true. – And he'd  
Been promised by his father long ago  
That one day he would have the privileges  
Of the ring – and that was also true.  
The father, each declared, could not have been 2000  
So false to him; and rather than allow  
Suspicion of deceit to fall on his  
Beloved father; he preferred to charge  
His brothers with deceit, although he would  
In general believe only the best 2005  
Of them; and vowed that he would find a way  
To expose the traitors and to take revenge.
- SALADIN And what about the judge? I want to hear  
What you will make him say to this. Go on!
- NATHAN The judge pronounced: Unless you bring your father 2010  
Here to me at once, I shall dismiss you  
From my court. Do you think that I am here  
For solving riddles? Or do you expect  
For the one true ring to speak up for itself?  
But wait! You tell me that the true ring has 2015  
The magic power to make beloved; to  
Gain favour in the sight of God and humankind.  
That must decide it! For the false rings cannot  
Have this power. Which brother do two  
Of you love most? Come on, speak up! You're silent? 2020  
Do the rings work only inwards and  
Not outwards? So that each one only loves  
Himself the best? All three of you are then  
Deceived deceivers; none of your  
Three rings is genuine. The one true ring 2025  
Has probably been lost. To hide the loss,  
As substitute, your father had three rings  
Made to replace the one.
- SALADIN Splendid! Splendid!
- NATHAN And so the judge went on, if you do not  
Want my advice instead of judgement, go! 2030  
But my advice is this: accept the case  
Precisely as it stands. As each of you







SALADIN    Do you need  
A chance to ask a favour of me? Speak!    2065

NATHAN I've come from a long journey during which  
I was collecting debts. And now I find  
I've almost too much ready money. Times  
Are once again becoming troubled, and,  
I do not know where I can put it safely. 2070  
So I thought that you might possibly, –  
Because one needs more money when a war  
Is near – that you could use some of it.

SALADIN      *(looking him straight in the eyes)*      Nathan –  
I won't ask you if you've just had a visit  
From Al-Hafi. And I won't enquire  
If some suspicion leads you to propose  
This offer of your own accord.

NATHAN Suspicion?

SALADIN    I deserve that. Please forgive me. What's  
The use? I must admit to you – that I  
Was just about to ...

NATHAN                                Surely not to ask                                2080  
This very thing?

SALADIN                                Indeed I was.

NATHAN

So that

Would help us both! – But I must tell you that  
I cannot send you *all* my ready cash  
Because of the Knight Templar. This young man  
Is known to you, I'm sure. My debt to him  
Is great, and I must pay it first.

2085

SALADIN A Templar?  
Surely you don't think of giving money  
To support my deadliest enemies?

NATHAN I'm speaking only of this one, whose life  
You spared.

SALADIN                                    Ah, what do you remind me of?                                    2090  
For I had quite forgotten this young man ...  
You know him? Tell me, where is he?

NATHAN    You mean  
You're unaware how much the mercy which  
You granted him has flowed through him to me?  
He risked his life, which you had newly spared,  
In rescuing my daughter from a fire.

2095



SALADIN Did he do that? He seemed that sort of man.  
 My brother would have done the same, and this  
 Man so resembles him. Is he still here?  
 Do bring him! – I have often told my sister 2100  
 Of this brother whom she never knew.  
 And now I really cannot let her miss  
 This chance to see his likeness, in the flesh.  
 So go, and fetch him! – See how, out of one  
 Good deed, which sprang from nothing more than passion, 2105  
 Many more good deeds can flow. Go fetch him!

NATHAN (*releasing Saladin's hand*)  
 Yes, this minute! And the other matter?  
 We're agreed on that? (*Exit*)

SALADIN I should have let  
 My sister listen – I must go to her!  
 But how can I explain all this to her? 2110  
 (*Exit on the other side*)

### Scene 8

Templar alone

(*Scene: under the palm trees near to the monastery, where the Templar is waiting for Nathan*)

TEMPLAR (*walking up and down, wrestling with himself until he bursts out*)  
 The sacrificial victim<sup>60</sup> stops exhausted –  
 So be it! I don't want to understand  
 What's going on within me; nor to sense  
 What's going to happen. All I know is that  
 I fled in vain. In vain! – But what else could 2115  
 I do but flee? – Well, what will be, will be.  
 I could not dodge the blow – it fell too quickly,  
 Although I had refused so long and hard  
 To fall beneath it. – To have seen this girl  
 Whom I had wanted so much *not* to see – 2120  
 To see her and resolve that I could never  
 Take my eyes from her again. Resolve?  
 Resolve means purpose, action. Whereas I,  
 I merely suffered passively. To see her  
 Was and is to feel entwined to her, 2125  
 Bound up with her. – To live apart from her  
 Is utterly unthinkable. It would  
 Be death to me – wherever we may be

<sup>60</sup> Jewish and Islamic, not Christian, ritual.



When we are dead, it would be death there too.  
 If this is love, then certainly a Templar 2130  
 Is in love, and certainly a Christian  
 Loves a Jewish girl. What of it? In  
 The promised land<sup>61</sup> – so full of promise now  
 For me! – I've cast off many prejudices.  
 What can my Order want of me? As Templar 2135  
 I am dead, and have been from the moment  
 That I became the Sultan's prisoner.  
 And could this head, a gift from Saladin,  
 Still be my old one? No, this head is new,  
 Quite ignorant of all the old one heard 2140  
 The bonds which held me. And this one is better,  
 Far more suited to my father's native skies.  
 That I can sense. For only with this head  
 Do I begin to think the way my father  
 Must have thought when he was here – unless 2145  
 I've been deceived by fairy tales about him.  
 Fairy tales? Perhaps. But credible,  
 And never more so than they seem now, when  
 I am at risk of stumbling where he fell.  
 Fell? I would rather fall with men, than stand 2150  
 With children. His example makes me sure  
 Of his approval. Whose approval do  
 I need apart from his? Nathan's? I need  
 Encouragement from him more than approval.  
 I cannot do without it. What a Jew! – 2155  
 And yet content to seem a Jew and nothing  
 Else. But here he comes in haste, his face  
 Aglow with joy, like everyone who comes  
 From Saladin. Hey Nathan!

### Scene 9

#### Nathan and the Templar

NATHAN

Ah, it's you!

TEMPLAR You stayed a very long time with the Sultan.

2160

NATHAN Not really very long. I was delayed  
 Before I went. I must say, Curd, the man  
 Deserves his fame. His fame is just his shadow.

---

<sup>61</sup> Exodus III 8. And I am come down to deliver them out of the land of the Egyptian and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey.



But he wants me first of all to tell you  
Quickly ...

TEMPLAR                      What?

NATHAN                      He wants to speak to you,                      2165  
And you're to go to him without delay.  
But first come home with me, where I must  
Deal with some other business for him,  
And then we'll go!

TEMPLAR                      Nathan, I cannot set foot  
In your house again until ...

NATHAN                      So you                      2170  
Have been there in the meantime? And  
You've spoken to her? – Well then? Tell me, how  
Does Recha please you?

TEMPLAR                      More than I can say!  
And yet, to see her once again – No, never!  
Never! Not until you promise, here                      2175  
And now, that I can see her always, and  
For ever.

NATHAN                      How do you expect me to  
Interpret that?

TEMPLAR (*after a short pause suddenly embraces him*)  
My father!

NATHAN                      But young man!

TEMPLAR (*just as suddenly stepping back*)  
Not son? I beg you, Nathan ...

NATHAN                      Dear young man!

TEMPLAR Not son? – but, Nathan, – I implore you, I                      2180  
Beseech you by the earliest bonds of nature! –  
Do not be more swayed by later ties –  
Just be content with being human. – Don't  
Push me away.

NATHAN                      My dear, dear friend ...

TEMPLAR                      And son?                      2185  
Not son? Would you not even call me son  
If in your daughter's heart her gratitude  
Had already prepared the way to love?  
Not even then, if both were just awaiting  
Your signal to be melted into one?  
You say nothing?



NATHAN                      You surprise me, young knight.                      2190

TEMPLAR I surprise you? I surprise you, Nathan,  
With your own thoughts? – But you don't mistake them  
When I put them into words myself?  
I surprise you?

NATHAN                                      I don't even know  
Your father's place in the Von Stauffen family.                                      2195

TEMPLAR What are you saying, Nathan? Can it be  
That in this moment you feel nothing more  
Than curiosity?

NATHAN                      You see, I knew  
A man called Stauffen long ago myself.  
His name was Conrad.

[illegible]

NATHAN Really?

TEMPLAR I was named after my father. Curd  
Is Conrad.

NATHAN                      But my Conrad cannot be  
Your father. For my Conrad was, like you,  
A Templar Knight, and he was never married. 2205

TEMPLAR Even so.

NATHAN                      What!

TEMPLAR                      Even so he could  
Have been my father.

NATHAN                      This must be a joke!

TEMPLAR And you are taking it too seriously.  
So what? A bastard, illegitimate!  
That's nothing to despise. But kindly spare me  
Any more research into my ancestry.  
And in return I'll leave yours well alone.

It's not as if I have the slightest doubt  
Of your ancestral tree. No, God forbid!  
You can authenticate it, leaf by leaf,  
Right back to Abraham. And further back  
I know it and could swear to it myself.

NATHAN You're bitter. But do I deserve it? Have  
I yet refused you anything? It's just  
That I don't want to hold you to your word  
Immediately – no more than this.



TEMPLAR You're sure?  
 No more than this? Forgive me!  
 NATHAN Come, just come!  
 TEMPLAR Where? – Not to your house. No! Not there. Not there!  
 There's a fire in there. I'll wait here for you. Go!  
 If I'm to see her once again, I'll see her 2225  
 Often. But if not, then I've already  
 Seen far too much of her.  
 NATHAN I'll hurry back. (*Exit*)

### Scene 10

#### The Templar and Daja

TEMPLAR Enough, more than enough! The human brain  
 Takes in an almost infinite amount,  
 Then suddenly it's full. Just one small thing 2230  
 And suddenly it's full! And then it's useless,  
 Quite useless, whatever fills it. – But be patient.  
 The soul begins to knead the swollen mass,  
 To shape it, and to clear some room, then light  
 And order come again. Am I in love 2235  
 Now for the first time? Or was what I thought  
 Was love, not love at all? – And is love only  
 What I'm feeling now?  
 DAJA (*who has slipped in from the side*)  
 Oh knight, sir knight!  
 TEMPLAR Who's calling? – Daja, so it's you?  
 DAJA I have  
 Slipped past him. But he still might see us there 2240  
 Where you are standing. So come closer to me  
 Over here, and hide behind this tree.  
 TEMPLAR But what's the matter? Why this secrecy?  
 DAJA Yes, it is a secret, which has brought  
 Me here to you; in fact a double one. 2245  
 Only I know one, and only you  
 The other – so how would it be, if we  
 Exchanged them? You trust me with yours, then I'll  
 Trust you with mine.  
 TEMPLAR With pleasure. – If I knew  
 What you suppose my secret is. But I 2250  
 Expect that will be clear from yours. So you  
 Begin.



- DAJA                    You think so? No, sir knight; first you,  
Then I shall follow. I assure you that  
My secret won't be any use at all  
To you if I don't have yours first. Come on! 2255  
For if I find it out by asking you,  
You'll not have told me anything. And then  
My secret stays my secret, while you've let  
Yours out. Poor knight! How can you men believe  
That you can keep a secret of this nature 2260  
From us women!
- TEMPLAR                    One that we don't know  
We have ourselves.
- DAJA                    That may be so. In that case  
I must prove my friendship to you and  
Enlighten you about it. Tell me, sir,  
What was the reason that you rushed away 2265  
From us so suddenly? Why did you leave  
Us sitting there? Why didn't you come back  
With Nathan? Did our Recha make so little  
Mark on you? Or was it all too much?  
Too much! Too much! Now tell me all about 2270  
The little bird, stuck on the lime twig, fluttering!  
In short; confess to me, that you're in love,  
That you're in love with her – madly in love.  
And I'll tell you something ...
- TEMPLAR                    Madly? Yes,  
You understand it very well.
- DAJA                    Then just 2275  
Admit the love to me; and I'll forget  
The madness.
- TEMPLAR                    But the madness is quite plain –  
A Templar Knight should love a Jewish girl!
- DAJA                    There doesn't seem much sense in it, that's true. –  
Yet sometimes there is more of sense in things 2280  
Than we suppose; and after all it would  
Not be so strange if Christ our Saviour drew  
Us to himself on paths that prudent men,  
Left to themselves, would hesitate to take.
- TEMPLAR                    So solemn? (And if I put 'Providence'  
Instead of Christ, is she not right?) – You make 2285  
Me much more curious than I am used  
To being.



DAJA Oh, this is the land of miracles!

TEMPLAR (At least of the miraculous. And how  
Could it be otherwise, when, after all, 2290  
The whole world crowds together here.) Dear Daja,  
I confess to you the thing you ask:  
That I love her, that I can't imagine  
How I'll live without her, and that I ...

DAJA You're sure, quite sure? Then swear to me that you 2295  
Will make her yours, to save her – yes to save her  
In this world and in eternity.

TEMPLAR And how? – How can I? – Can I swear what does  
Not lie within my power?

DAJA But it does  
Lie in your power. I shall put it in 2300  
Your power with a single word.

TEMPLAR You mean  
Her father will agree to it?

DAJA The father!  
He will have to do so.

TEMPLAR Have to, Daja?  
But he's not yet fallen among thieves –  
He must not *have* to. 2305

DAJA Well, then he must want to.  
Must be glad to in the end.

TEMPLAR He must?  
And gladly? Daja, if I tell you that  
I have already tried myself to touch  
This chord in him?

DAJA What? Did he not agree?

TEMPLAR He did, but with a dissonance which was 2310  
Offensive to me.

DAJA Are you telling me  
That when you let him glimpse the slightest hint  
Of your wish for Recha, he did not  
Leap up for joy? But that he drew back  
Frostily? And that he began to make 2315  
Difficulties?

TEMPLAR Yes, something like that.

DAJA Then I'll not hesitate a moment longer –  
(Pause)



TEMPLAR You're still hesitating.

DAJA He is so good  
Otherwise. And I owe him so much.  
But the fact is that he will not listen. 2320  
God knows, my heart bleeds to compel him to.

TEMPLAR Once and for all, I beg you, Daja, put me  
Out of this uncertainty. But if  
You are still doubtful whether you should call  
What you are planning good or evil, shameful 2325  
Or laudable, say nothing. I'll forget  
That you have something to conceal.

DAJA That spurs  
Me on instead of stopping me. Well, then,  
Recha is no Jew; she is – a Christian.

TEMPLAR (*coldly*)  
So? Congratulations! Was the labour 2330  
Hard? Don't let the birth pangs daunt you. Keep on  
Propagating heaven's population  
If you can't achieve the same on earth.

DAJA What? Does my news deserve this ridicule?  
That Recha is a Christian causes you, 2335  
A Christian, and a Templar Knight who loves  
Her, no more joy than that?

TEMPLAR Above all since  
She is a Christian of your own creation.

DAJA Ah! So that is what you thought I meant!  
I'd like to see the one who could convert 2340  
Her! She was destined long ago to be  
What she could not become.

TEMPLAR Explain or – go!

DAJA She is a Christian child, of Christian parents,  
And she was baptised ...

TEMPLAR (*quickly*) And Nathan?

DAJA He is  
Not her father.

TEMPLAR Not her father? Do 2345  
You know what you are saying?

DAJA Just the truth,  
Which has so often cost me tears of blood.  
No, he is not her father ...







**Act IV****Scene 1****The Lay Brother and the Templar***(Scene: In the cloisters of the monastery)*

- LAY BROTHER Yes, yes, no doubt the Patriarch is right!  
And yet I really wasn't able to 2380  
Succeed in all that he commissioned me  
To undertake. Why does he only give  
Me things like this to do? I cannot be  
So subtle, cannot be persuasive, cannot  
Stick my nose in everywhere, or have 2385  
A hand in everything. And was this why  
For my own sake, I left the world behind,  
Only to find myself involved in worldly  
Matters for the sake of others?
- TEMPLAR *(coming quickly up to him)* Ah!  
Good brother! There you are. I have been looking 2390  
For you.
- LAY BROTHER Me, sir?
- TEMPLAR You don't recognise me?
- LAY BROTHER Yes of course, sir. But I thought that I  
Would never in my life encounter you  
Again. Indeed I hoped to God that I  
Would not. God knows how bitter to me was 2395  
The proposition which I was obliged  
To bring to you. He knows if I sincerely  
Wished to find in you a ready ear.  
He also knows how greatly I was pleased,  
Sincerely pleased, that you turned down outright 2400  
With little hesitation, everything  
That is improper for a knight.  
But now you've come, so it had some effect.
- TEMPLAR You know already why I've come? I scarcely  
Know myself.
- LAY BROTHER You've thought it over, and 2405  
Have now concluded that the Patriarch  
Was not so wrong at all; that wealth and honour  
Can be gained by his proposal; that  
An enemy is still an enemy  
Though he may be our saviour seven times. 2410  
You've weighed it up in human terms and come  
To offer your acceptance – ah, dear God!



- TEMPLAR      My dear and pious man! Be reassured  
I have not come for this. I do not want  
To speak about it to the Patriarch. 2415  
On this I still think as I thought before  
And I don't want, at any price, to lose  
The good opinion with which such an upright,  
Such a pious man, has honoured me. 2419/20  
I've simply come to ask the Patriarch's  
Advice about a matter.
- LAY BROTHER      You? To ask  
The Patriarch? A knight has come to ask  
A priest?  
(*Looking round nervously*)
- TEMPLAR      Yes, it's a rather priestly matter.
- LAY BROTHER      Yet a priest would never ask a knight's 2425  
Advice, however much it was a matter  
For a knight.
- TEMPLAR      But that's because the priest  
Enjoys the privilege of doing wrong,  
Which those like me do not much envy him.  
Of course, if I were only acting for 2430  
Myself, and if I were accountable 2430  
To no-one but myself, what need would I have  
Of your Patriarch? In certain things  
I'd rather do what's wrong, according to  
The will of others, than what's right according  
To my own. Besides, I see now that 2435  
Religion too is partisan; however  
Impartial anyone may think himself,  
Unconsciously he's bound to stand up for  
His own cause. Since that's how things are, perhaps  
That's how they should be.
- LAY BROTHER      Sir, I couldn't say. 2440  
I do not really understand you.
- TEMPLAR      Yet – 2440  
(Let me consider what I really want:  
To be commanded or advised? Advised  
By honesty or learning?) Thank you, brother  
Thank you for your hint. – Why ask the Patriarch?  
You be my Patriarch! Indeed I want 2445  
To ask the Christian in the Patriarch  
More than the Patriarch in the Christian.  
My question is ...



LAY BROTHER                    No more, sir, please no more!  
 It's pointless. – You mistake me, sir – The man  
 Who knows a lot has many cares, and I  
 Have pledged myself to but a single care.<sup>62</sup>  
 Good! Listen! Look! He's here, and I'm in luck.  
 Stay here. He has already noticed you.

## Scene 2

The Patriarch who enters with all the pomp of a religious procession, the Lay Brother, and the Templar

TEMPLAR                    I wish I could avoid him. This is not  
                                  My man. A rosy, fat and amicable                    2455  
                                  Prelate! And what pomp!

LAY BROTHER    And you should see him  
 Setting out for court. Now he has only  
 Come back from visiting the sick.

TEMPLAR    He must  
                                  Put Saladin himself to shame!

PATRIARCH                    *(coming closer, beckons to the Lay Brother)*  
                                  Come here!  
                                  That is the Templar, isn't it? What does                    2460  
                                  He want?

LAY BROTHER                    I do not know.

PATRIARCH                    *(going up to the Templar, while his followers and the Lay Brother  
 draw back)*

                                 Well now, sir knight!  
 I'm very pleased to see a fine young man.  
 So very young! Now, with the help of God  
 Something may come of this.

TEMPLAR    But hardly more,  
                                  Your Reverence, than is already there,                    2465  
                                  And maybe rather less.

PATRIARCH    I wish at least  
                                  That such a pious knight may bloom and flourish  
                                  For beloved Christianity,  
                                  The honour and the service of God's cause!  
                                  And that can hardly fail, if youthful courage                    2470  
                                  Is prepared to follow the mature  
                                  Advice of age. How else, sir, may I be  
                                  Of service to you?

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<sup>62</sup> As a Lay Brother he had made a vow only of obedience.







TEMPLAR	I should Have thought that, to obtain your Reverence's View, it would all be the same.	2515
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PATRIARCH

The same?

You see, Sir, how the pride of human reason  
Can err in spiritual things. – Quite wrong!  
For if the case which you have just described  
Is just an intellectual game, it does 2520  
Not merit serious consideration.  
I would refer you to the theatre<sup>63</sup> with  
It, sir, where pros and cons of such a kind  
Might be debated and could win there great  
Applause. But if you have not simply mocked 2525  
Me, sir, with a dramatic jest, and if  
The case is really factual, if it  
Is even possible it has occurred  
Within our diocese, our own dear city  
Of Jerusalem – well then –

TEMPLAR	What then?	2530
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PATRIARCH      Why, then the Jew would swiftly undergo  
                          The penalty laid down by papal and  
                          Imperial law for such a sacrilege,  
                          For such a wicked crime.

TEMPLAR                      Indeed?

PATRIARCH	It is	
A fact that the aforesaid laws lay down		2535
That any Jew who leads astray a Christian		
To apostasy <sup>64</sup> – shall burn to death –		
Burn at the stake –		

TEMPLAR Indeed?

PATRIARCH

And how much more  
A Jew who snatched a helpless Christian child  
By force from its baptismal ties. For is  
Not everything that's done to children, force –  
Excepting what the Church itself may do  
To children.

2540

TEMPLAR                      But suppose the child might well  
Have died in misery, if she had not  
Been rescued by the Jew.

<sup>63</sup> A deliberate anachronism on Lessing's part.

<sup>64</sup> Apostasy – renunciation of the Christian faith.







- TEMPLAR I  
 Regret that I cannot enjoy this splendid  
 Sermon at my leisure. But I have 2585  
 Been called to Saladin.
- PATRIARCH To Saladin? Yes? – Well – of course  
 – then –
- TEMPLAR I will ensure the Sultan is prepared  
 For this, if that's your Reverence's wish.
- PATRIARCH Ah, yes! – I know you have found favour, sir,  
 With Saladin. I ask you to remember 2590  
 Me to him in the very best of terms.  
 I'm driven wholly by my zeal for God.  
 And if I go too far, it is for him –  
 I hope you will bear that in mind, dear sir.  
 And what you said just now about the Jew 2595  
 Was nothing more than a debating point?  
 That is to say –
- TEMPLAR Just a debating point. (*Exit*)
- PATRIARCH (Which I must thoroughly investigate.  
 So this will be another task to give  
 To Brother Bonafides) – Here, my son. 2600  
 (*He talks to the Lay Brother as he goes out*)  
 (I have another errand for you)

### Scene 3

#### Saladin and Sittah

(*Scene: a room in Saladin's palace into which a large number of bags are being carried by slaves and being piled up on the floor.*) Saladin is joined by Sittah

- SALADIN (*coming in*)  
 Well really, there's no end to this. Is there  
 Much more to come?
- SLAVE About as much again.
- SALADIN Then take the rest to Sittah. – And where has  
 Al-Hafi gone? Al-Hafi should be taking  
 All this money straight away – or had 2605  
 I better send it to my father? Here  
 It will just slip straight through my fingers. Yet  
 One does get hardened in the end; now it  
 Will take some skill to get much out of me.  
 At least till all the gold from Egypt has 2610  
 Arrived, the poor will have to cope as best  
 They can. As long as alms can still be given







SALADIN                                That's good! – (And now  
His voice! I wonder what it's like. Within  
My soul, somewhere the voice of Assad sleeps.)                                2650

### Scene 4

# The Templar and Saladin

TEMPLAR      Your prisoner, Sultan ...

SALADIN My prisoner?  
If I grant life to someone shall I not  
Grant freedom to him also?

TEMPLAR                                 It is fitting  
I should hear what you think fitting, not  
Anticipate your actions. And yet, Sultan,  
To express my special thanks to you  
For sparing me is not in keeping with my rank  
Or with my character. In any case  
My life is once more at your service.

2655

SALADIN

Do

Not use your life against me! I would gladly 2660  
Grant my enemy another pair  
Of hands. To grant him such a heart would be  
More difficult. I've not in any way  
Misjudged you – you're a fine young man. And you're  
The very image of my Assad. I 2665  
Might even ask you: where have you been hiding  
All this time? And in what cave have you  
Been sleeping?<sup>65</sup> What good spirit, in what fairy  
Land, has kept this flower so fresh for all  
This time? Indeed, I could remind you of 2670  
The things we used to do together, you  
And I. And yet, I could be angry with  
You, too, for keeping one thing secret from me,

<sup>65</sup> The legend of the Seven Sleepers tells of seven young people, who would not worship the emperor as god, who were hidden by a shepherd in a cave, which was then sealed up by the emperor. After 186 years they woke up, not having aged.



For there's one adventure which you never  
 Shared with me. Indeed I could; if I 2675  
 Saw only you, and not myself as well.  
 So be it! There remains such truth in this  
 Sweet reverie that in the autumn of  
 My days an Assad is alive again.  
 Are you content with this, knight?

TEMPLAR Everything 2680  
 That comes to me from you – whatever it  
 May be – my soul desires already.

SALADIN Let  
 Us test that out. Would you remain with me,  
 Stay near me? – As a Christian, Muslim – either  
 In your white cloak or in an Arab robe 2685  
 With turban or with your felt cap. Just as  
 You like. It's all the same. I've never wanted  
 The same bark to grow on every tree.

TEMPLAR Or you would hardly be the man you are:  
 A hero who would rather be God's gardener. 2690

SALADIN Well, if you think no worse of me, we are  
 Already half agreed?

TEMPLAR Completely!

SALADIN (*offering his hand*) Here's  
 My hand.

TEMPLAR (*taking his hand*)  
 And mine – with this, accept far more  
 Than you could take from me. Now I am yours.

SALADIN These gains are too much for a single day! 2695  
 He did not come with you?

TEMPLAR Who?

SALADIN Nathan.

TEMPLAR (*coldly*)  
 No.  
 I came alone.

SALADIN How fine a deed of yours!  
 And what wise fortune that a deed like that  
 Should turn out for the good of such a man.

TEMPLAR Oh, yes.

SALADIN So cold? – Oh no, young man! When God 2700  
 Does something good through us, one must not be  
 So cold! – One must not even wish to seem  
 So cold from modesty.



2705

2710

2715

2720

2725

2735

# Because



I jumped into the fire a second time – 2740  
 For now *I* wooed and now *I* was disdained.

SALADIN Disdained?

TEMPLAR Well, the wise father did not flatly  
 Turn me down. The wise father would need  
 To make enquiries first, he needed to  
 Reflect. Of course! Did I not do that too? 2745  
 Did I not make enquiries, and reflect  
 While she was screaming in the fire? Indeed!  
 My God! My God! How fine a thing it is  
 To be so wise, and circumspect.

SALADIN Come now!  
 You might make some allowance for his age. 2750  
 How long do you suppose he can refuse?  
 Do you expect him to demand that you  
 Should first become a Jew yourself?

TEMPLAR Who knows!

SALADIN Who knows? – A man who knows this Nathan better.

TEMPLAR The superstition in which we grew up 2755  
 Does not relax its power over us,  
 Not even when we see it as it is.  
 And so, not all who mock their chains are free.

SALADIN Yes, how mature! But Nathan, really, Nathan ...

TEMPLAR And the worst of superstitions is 2760  
 To think one's own most tolerable.

SALADIN That  
 May be. But Nathan ...

TEMPLAR To let dull  
 Humanity believe in that alone  
 Till it can take the brighter light of truth;  
 In that alone ...

SALADIN Agreed. But Nathan, – Nathan 2765  
 Does not have this weakness.

TEMPLAR So I thought.  
 If none the less this paragon of men  
 Were such a common Jew that he had sought out  
 Christian children so that he could bring  
 Them up as Jews; – what would you think of that? 2770

SALADIN But who says that of him?

TEMPLAR The girl herself  
 With whom he lured me on, as if he wished  
 To pay me with the promise of her for  
 An act which he assumed I didn't do



For nothing. The girl is not his daughter – no: 2775  
She is a foundling Christian child.

SALADIN But even  
So, he did not want to give her to you?

TEMPLAR (*stormily*)  
Whether he did or not! He is unmasked.  
This tolerant old windbag is unmasked.  
I'll call for dogs to be unleashed upon 2780  
This Jewish wolf in philosophical<sup>66</sup>  
Sheep's clothing, and they'll tear him limb from limb!

SALADIN (*sternly*)  
Be quiet, Christian!

TEMPLAR What? Be quiet, Christian?  
When Jews and Muslims all insist on being  
Jews and Muslims, only Christians may  
Not act the Christian?

SALADIN (*more sternly*) Quiet, Christian!

TEMPLAR (*calmly*) Now  
I feel the weight of the reproach compressed  
In these two words by Saladin. Ah, if  
I knew how Assad – how your Assad would  
Have acted in my place!

SALADIN Oh, not much better! 2790

Probably as violently. But who  
Already taught you, just like him, to pierce  
Me with a single word? Of course, if everything  
Turns out as you have said, then I myself  
Can not make Nathan out at all. But in 2795  
The meantime he is still my friend, and none  
Among my friends must quarrel with another.  
Take my advice; proceed with care. Don't give  
Him straight to the fanatics in your mob.  
Just imagine what your clergy would 2800  
Demand from me as a revenge on him.  
Do not be a Christian just to spite  
A Jew or Muslim.

TEMPLAR It might soon have been  
Too late, but for the Patriarch's blood lust,  
Which made me shudder to become his tool.

---

<sup>66</sup> Matthew 7:15. 'Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.'



- SALADIN What? 2805  
 You went to see the Patriarch, before  
 You came to me?
- TEMPLAR Yes in a storm of passion,  
 In a whirl of indecision. Please  
 Forgive me! From now on I fear you will  
 Not want to recognize Assad in me. 2810
- SALADIN Unless I recognize this fear itself!  
 I know the faults from which our virtue springs.  
 Just practice virtue, and the faults will do you  
 Little harm with me. But you must go.  
 Now seek out Nathan, as he sought you out; 2815  
 And bring him here. I have to make you understand  
 Each other. If you're serious  
 About the girl, don't worry – she is yours.  
 And Nathan also must be made to pay  
 For having dared to rear a Christian child 2820  
 Without the taste of pork.<sup>67</sup> Now go!  
*(The Templar goes out and Sittah leaves the sofa)*

### Scene 5

#### Saladin and Sittah

- SITTAH How strange!
- SALADIN Admit it, Sittah; don't you think my Assad  
 Must have been a handsome, fine young man?
- SITTAH If he was really like that, and the Templar  
 Did not sit as model for this portrait! 2825  
 But Saladin, how could you have forgotten  
 To enquire about his parents?
- SALADIN In  
 Particular about his mother, whether  
 She had ever visited this country –  
 Is that what you mean?
- SITTAH You could have asked. 2830
- SALADIN It's certainly quite possible. For Assad  
 Was so welcome among pretty Christian  
 Ladies, was entranced by Christian ladies,  
 That there even was a rumour – well,  
 One doesn't like to talk about it. It's 2835  
 Enough I have him back – and want him back  
 With all his faults, with all the changing moods

<sup>67</sup> Eating pork is forbidden both by Jewish and Islamic religions.



Of his warm heart. Oh, surely Nathan must  
Give him the girl. Don't you agree?

SITTAH Give her?  
Give her up!

SALADIN Indeed. What kind of right 2840  
Could Nathan have to her, if he is not  
Her father? Only one who saved her life  
Has rights to her, inherited from one  
Who gave her life.

SITTAH Well Saladin? Suppose 2845  
You have the girl brought here to you? Remove  
Her straight away from her unlawful owner.

SALADIN Is that really necessary?

SITTAH Not 2850  
Exactly necessary. Curiosity  
Alone makes me suggest it to you.  
With certain men I want to know as soon  
As possible the kind of girl with whom  
They are inclined to fall in love.

SALADIN Then, send  
For her, and have her brought here.

SITTAH May I, brother?

SALADIN But spare Nathan's feelings. He must not 2855  
Believe that we intend to tear the girl  
From him by force.

SITTAH Don't worry.

SALADIN And meanwhile  
I must find out what's happened to Al-Hafi.

## Scene 6

Nathan and Daja

*(Scene: the hall in Nathan's house, opening on to the palms; as in the first scene. Part of the goods and treasures are lying around unpacked as they are being sorted out)*

DAJA Oh, this is all so splendid! Exquisite!  
Oh, everything – as only you can give.  
Where do they make this silver cloth with interwoven 2860  
Gold? What does it cost? That's what  
I call a bridal dress! No queen could ask  
For better.

NATHAN Bridal dress? Why bridal dress?



- DAJA                    Of course you did not think of that when you  
Were buying it. But truly, Nathan, it                    2865  
Must be this one and nothing else. It is  
As if intended for a bride. The white  
Background, symbol of innocence; the golden  
Threads which twist and turn all over it,  
Symbol of riches. Look at it: it's lovely!                    2870
- NATHAN                What are you telling me? Whose bridal dress  
Are you interpreting so learnedly?  
Are you the bride?
- DAJA                    I?
- NATHAN                                Who then?
- DAJA    I? Dear God!
- NATHAN                But who? Whose bridal dress are you describing?  
This is all for you and no one else.                    2875
- DAJA                    All this is mine? For me? And not for Recha?
- NATHAN                What I bought for Recha is still packed  
Inside another bale. Go on! Away!  
Take all your bits and pieces!
- DAJA    Oh you tempter!  
No. If this were all the treasure of                    2880  
The whole wide world. I wouldn't touch it, Not  
Unless you swear to me that you will use  
This unique opportunity, which heaven  
Will not offer you a second time.
- NATHAN                Use what? – An opportunity for what?                    2885
- DAJA                    Oh, don't pretend that you don't know – in short,  
The Templar Knight loves Recha; give her to him,  
By doing so, at once you end your sin  
Which I cannot keep secret any longer.  
The girl will be with Christians once again,                    2890  
Will once again be what she is; and once  
Again be what she was. And you, whom we  
Can never thank enough for all your goodness,  
At last you will escape the coals of fire<sup>68</sup>  
Upon your head.
- NATHAN                                Again the same old song?                    2895  
But you have fixed a new string to your lyre,  
Which will not hold or stay in tune, I fear.

<sup>68</sup> Romans 12:20. 'Therefore if thine enemy hunger feed him, if he thirst give him drink, for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.'



- DAJA Why not?
- NATHAN The Templar is a good man, and  
To no one in the world would I prefer  
To give my Recha, but – have patience.
- DAJA Patience? 2900  
Isn't patience just the same old song  
From you?
- NATHAN Just patience for a few more days!  
But look – who's that approaching? It's a lay brother  
Go, and ask him what he wants.
- DAJA What can he want?  
(*She goes and asks him*)
- NATHAN Before he asks, just give him alms – (If 2905  
I could only sound the Templar Knight out first  
And not tell him the reason why I ask.  
For if I tell him and there are no grounds  
For my suspicion, I have put the father  
Needlessly at risk.) What does he want? 2910
- DAJA He wants to speak to you.
- NATHAN Well, let him come:  
And meanwhile you can go.

**Scene 7****Nathan and the Lay Brother**

- NATHAN (If only I  
Could still be Recha's father! – Can't I be,  
Even when I cease to bear the name?  
She herself will always call me father 2915  
If she sees how much it means to me.)  
What service can I do you, holy brother?
- LAY BROTHER Very little. – Nathan, sir, I'm pleased  
To see you are still well.
- NATHAN You know me then?
- LAY BROTHER Indeed; who doesn't know you? You have pressed 2920  
Your name into the hands of many people.  
It has remained in mine for many years.
- NATHAN (*reaching for his purse*)  
Come, brother, come; I will refresh it.
- LAY BROTHER Thank you,  
I'd be stealing from a poorer man,  
So I'll take nothing. But allow me to 2925  
Refresh your memory about my name.







- NATHAN           *(Taken aback)*   What?
- LAY BROTHER                               Just, just let me finish. Then  
   He orders me to run this Jew to earth  
   Without delay, if possible, and he                               2960  
   Condemns most vehemently such a crime  
   Which is, it seems to him, the very sin  
   Against the Holy Ghost<sup>71</sup> – that is the sin  
   Which, of all sins, is counted by us as  
   The greatest; but thank God we don't exactly                               2965  
   Know what such a sin consists of. Then  
   My conscience suddenly awakes and it  
   Occurs to me that, long ago, perhaps  
   I gave the opportunity for this  
   Great, unpardonable sin. So tell   2970  
   Me: eighteen years ago did not a groom  
   Bring you a little girl a few weeks old?
- NATHAN           What? – Yes, that's true – I do admit –
- LAY BROTHER   Well then,  
   Just look at me. I am that groom.
- NATHAN   You are?
- LAY BROTHER   The gentleman from whom I brought her was –                               2975  
   If I remember right – a Herr von Filnek –  
   Wolf von Filnek.
- NATHAN   Right!
- LAY BROTHER   The mother had  
   Just died, and suddenly the father had  
   To hurry off – I think to Gaza,<sup>72</sup> where  
   The little thing could not go with him. So   2980  
   He had her sent to you. Did I not meet  
   You with her in Darun?<sup>73</sup>
- NATHAN   Quite right.
- LAY BROTHER   It would  
   Be little wonder, if my memory  
   Deceived me. I've had many worthy masters,  
   And I served this one all too short a time.   2985

<sup>71</sup> Matthew 12:31. 'The blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.'

<sup>72</sup> Gaza was recaptured from the Crusaders by Saladin.

<sup>73</sup> Darun – on the Palestinian border near to Egypt.







That Christians could so utterly forget  
That our dear saviour was a Jew. 3025

NATHAN Good brother, you must be my advocate  
If hatred and hypocrisy are roused  
Against me – all because of such a deed –  
Ah, such a deed! Now you alone shall know  
About it. Take it with you to the grave! 3030  
Vanity has never tempted me  
To speak of it to anyone. To you  
Alone, I'll speak, to you and to your simple  
Piety. For only such a one  
Can understand what deeds can be achieved 3035  
By human beings who submit to God.

LAY BROTHER You're deeply moved; your eyes are full of tears.

NATHAN In Darun you met me with the child.  
But you don't know that, only days before,  
In Gath,<sup>75</sup> the Christians murdered all the Jews, 3040  
Their wives and children; and you do not know  
That in this number were my wife and, with  
Her, seven sons, all full of promise. In  
My brother's house, where I had sent them to  
Be safe, they burned to death.

LAY BROTHER Almighty God! 3045

NATHAN When you arrived, three days and nights, in dust  
And ashes, I had lain before my God  
And wept. But more than wept, I argued bitterly  
With God, I stormed, I raged, I cursed myself  
And all the world, and swore undying hate 3050  
Of Christendom at large.

LAY BROTHER That I believe.

NATHAN And yet my reason gradually returned.  
It spoke with gentle voice: 'Yet God exists.  
And even this was God's decree. And so,  
Arise and act the way you long have understood; 3055  
It surely is not harder now to act  
Than it has been to understand, if you  
But have the will. Stand up!' – And so I stood,  
And cried to God, 'I will! If only you  
Can will me to it.' At that moment, you 3060  
Dismounted from your horse, and handed me  
The child wrapped in your cloak. What passed between

<sup>75</sup> Gath – on the Mediterranean coast.



Us I forget. But this I know: I took  
 The child, I put it on my couch, and kissed it  
 Fell upon my knees and sobbed: 'Oh God!  
 For seven, one is now restored!' 3065

LAY BROTHER Oh Nathan!  
 You're a Christian! Yes, by God, a Christian!  
 A better Christian there has never been!

NATHAN It works both ways. For what makes me a Christian  
 In your eyes, makes you a Jew in mine. 3070  
 But enough of all our feelings. We  
 Need action! And although my love already  
 Binds me seven fold to this one foreign  
 Girl, although the thought already kills me  
 That I must lose my seven sons again 3075  
 In her – if providence demands that I  
 Surrender her again, – I shall obey.

LAY BROTHER Now that's exactly the advice I had  
 In mind to offer you. But now your own  
 Good spirit has already said the same. 3080

NATHAN But I can't let anyone who comes  
 Along tear her from me.

LAY BROTHER Of course not.

NATHAN One  
 Who has no greater rights to her than I  
 Must at the least have earlier rights –

LAY BROTHER Of course.

NATHAN Rights granted him by nature and the ties  
 Of family. 3085

LAY BROTHER Yes, I agree.

NATHAN So quickly  
 Name the man related to her – brother,  
 Uncle, cousin, other relative;  
 I won't refuse her to him – for she was  
 Created and brought up to be the pride 3090  
 Of any house, of any faith. I hope  
 That you know more than I about this man  
 Who was your master, and his family.

LAY BROTHER Good Nathan, I'm afraid I hardly do!  
 I have already told you that I served  
 Him only very briefly. 3095

NATHAN Do you not  
 At least have any knowledge of the mother's  
 Family? – Was she perhaps a Stauffen?



LAY BROTHER Possibly! – I think so.

NATHAN Was her brother  
Not Conrad von Stauffen, a Knight Templar? 3100

LAY BROTHER If I'm not mistaken. Yes. But wait.  
I think I still possess my master's little  
Book which he kept by his heart. I took  
It when we buried him in Askalon.

NATHAN Yes?

LAY BROTHER A book containing prayers – what we call 3105  
A breviary. This, I thought, could still  
Be useful to a Christian – not to me,  
I cannot read.

NATHAN That doesn't matter. Carry  
On.

LAY BROTHER At the beginning and the end 3110  
Of this small book, so I've been told, are written,  
In the gentleman's own hand the names  
Of both the families.

NATHAN Just as I hoped!  
Go quickly! Bring the book to me. But run!  
I'll offer you the weight of it in gold,  
Together with a thousand thanks; be quick! 3115

LAY BROTHER With pleasure. But my master's writing is  
In Arabic. (*Exit*)

NATHAN It doesn't matter, bring it!  
Oh God! If I could only keep the girl  
And gain a son-in-law like him as well!  
It's hardly likely. Well then, let things turn 3120  
Out as they will. But who can it have been  
Who brought this matter to the notice of  
The Patriarch? I must remember to  
Investigate. Could it have been Daja?

### Scene 8

Daja and Nathan

DAJA (*in a hurry and embarrassed*)  
Just imagine Nathan!

NATHAN What is it? 3125

DAJA The poor child was quite terrified by it!  
They've sent for her ...

NATHAN The Patriarch?



- DAJA The Sultan's  
Sister, Princess Sittah ...
- NATHAN Not the Patriarch?
- DAJA No, Sittah! – Don't you hear me? – Princess Sittah  
Sent for her. She wants to see her.
- NATHAN Who? 3130  
She sent for Recha? – Sittah sent for her?  
Well then, If Sittah sends for her, and not  
The Patriarch ...
- DAJA Why mention him?
- NATHAN So you've  
Heard nothing from him recently? You're sure?  
You've told him nothing?
- DAJA I? Tell him?
- NATHAN Where are 3135  
The messengers?
- DAJA Outside.
- NATHAN For safety's sake  
I'll speak to them myself. Just come! – I hope  
The Patriarch is not behind all this. (*Exit*)
- DAJA And I – I have a different fear. What's going  
On? A girl who is supposed to be 3140  
The only daughter of a wealthy Jew  
Would be no bad match for a Muslim? – Oh,  
The Templar's chance is lost. He's lost, unless  
I venture now upon the second step,  
And tell the girl herself just who she is. 3145  
I must! As soon as I can talk to her  
Alone, I'll grasp the opportunity.  
And that will be – perhaps right now, when I  
Go with her. On our way at least I'll drop  
A hint to start with. That can do no harm. 3150  
Yes, yes, it's now or never! I must speak. (*Exit*)



## Act V

## Scene 1

Saladin and Mameluke<sup>76</sup>

*(Scene: The room in Saladin's palace into which the sacks of money have been carried – which are still to be seen)*

SALADIN *(as he comes in)*  
 The money is still here, and no one yet  
 Knows where the Dervish is – presumably  
 He's found a chessboard somewhere, and that always  
 Seems to make him forget himself; – 3155  
 So why not me? I must be patient. Yes?

MAMELUKE The news you hoped for, Sultan. Joyful news –  
 The caravan from Cairo has arrived,  
 It's safely here, and brings you seven years  
 Of tribute from the wealthy Nile.

SALADIN Good, Ibrahim! 3160  
 You are indeed a welcome messenger.  
 At last! It's here at last! My thanks to you  
 For the good news.

MAMELUKE *(waiting)* (Well? Come on, hand it over!)

SALADIN Why are you waiting? You may go.

MAMELUKE You give  
 Me welcome, nothing else?

SALADIN What else?

MAMELUKE The welcome 3165  
 Messenger gets no reward? – So Saladin  
 Has learned to pay with words, and I'm the first  
 To benefit? That's fame, to be the first  
 He treated meanly.

SALADIN Well then, take a sack  
 Of money for yourself.

MAMELUKE Not now. Not even if 3170  
 You gave me all of them.

SALADIN Defiance! Come,  
 Take two of them. He means it? Now he's gone,  
 Surpassing me in generosity,  
 Although for him it must be harder to  
 Refuse it than for me to give. Come back! 3175

<sup>76</sup> Mameluke – member of the Sultan's bodyguard.



What has come over me so near my death  
That suddenly I want to change my nature?  
Does Saladin refuse to die as Saladin?  
Then he should not have lived as Saladin.

MAMELUKE 2 Greetings, Sultan.

SALADIN If you've come to tell me ... 3180

MAMELUKE 2 That the caravan from Egypt has arrived.

SALADIN I know already.

MAMELUKE 2 Then I came too late.

SALADIN And why too late? – Here for your good intentions  
You can take a sack or two.

MAMELUKE 2 Ah, one  
Or two makes three!

SALADIN So you can count? Just take  
them. 3185

MAMELUKE 2 There may be a third man coming – that is  
If he's able.

SALADIN Meaning what?

MAMELUKE 2 Well now;  
It's possible he has a broken neck; because  
As soon as we, the three of us, were sure  
The convoy had arrived, we galloped off. 3190  
The one who was in front fell off his horse.  
Then I was in the lead, and stayed there till  
We came into the town, where Ibrahim,  
The rogue, has better knowledge of the streets.

SALADIN But what about the one who fell, my friend? 3195  
Ride out and meet him.

MAMELUKE 2 Yes I will. And if  
He's still alive, I'll give him half the money.  
(Exit)

SALADIN He's a good and noble fellow too.  
Who else can boast of Mamelukes like these?  
And may I not believe that they are what 3200  
They are, at least in part, from my example?  
I must reject the thought of changing that  
Example as I end my days.

MAMELUKE 3 Sultan!

SALADIN You're  
The one who fell?



[illegible]

SALADIN Quick! Bring  
Him here. Ah, here he is.

## Scene 2

# Emir Mansor and Saladin

SALADIN    You are most welcome.

Emir. How did it go? Mansor, Mansor,  
You have kept us waiting for so long!

MANSOR      This letter tells you what kind of unrest  
In Thebes<sup>77</sup> your Abukassem had to quell  
Before we dared to set off on our way.  
After that, I forced the pace as much  
As possible.

SALADIN                                Yes, I believe you, Emir.

Now, good Mansor – and I know you'll do  
It gladly – you must take fresh escort straight  
Away. And you must leave again at once,  
And take the bulk of all this money to  
My father in the Lebanon.

3215

MANSOR                                Yes, gladly.  
Very gladly.

SALADIN                      Be sure to take                      3220  
Sufficient escort. It's no longer safe  
In Lebanon. Have you not heard? The Templars  
Are in action once again. Be on  
Your guard. Now, where's the camel train? I want  
To see it and take care of everything                      3225  
Myself. You there! I'll be with Sittah later.

### Scene 3

# The Templar

(Scene: the palms in front of Nathan's house where the Templar is pacing up and down)

TEMLAR I won't set foot inside the house again –  
He must appear eventually. They welcomed  
Me so eagerly before, and now  
I'm likely to be told that he no longer

<sup>77</sup> In upper Egypt.



Tolerates my presence all the time  
 Outside his house. And yet I also feel  
 Provoked to anger. What has so embittered  
 Me against him? – After all he said,  
 He didn't yet refuse me anything. 3235  
 The Sultan promised to persuade him – what  
 Then? Is it that the Christian in me is  
 More deeply rooted than the Jew in him?  
 Who really knows himself? Why else should I  
 Be so reluctant to allow the little 3240  
 Theft which he committed for his purposes  
 Against the Christians. But this is no little  
 Theft of such a creature! Creature? Who  
 Is her creator? Not the slave, who floated  
 The unhewn block on to the barren shore 3245  
 Of life, and then ran off. No, it must surely  
 Be the artist who, in the abandoned block,  
 Conceived a godly form and fashioned it.  
 Truly, Recha's real father must  
 Remain, despite the Christian who begot 3250  
 Her, must remain the Jew forever. If  
 I think of her as just a Christian girl,  
 And think of her devoid of everything  
 Which only such a Jew could give to her,  
 Then, my heart, what would you see in her? – 3255  
 Almost nothing! For her smile itself  
 Would be a sweet and gentle movement of  
 The muscles, nothing more. And if what made  
 Her smile was never worthy of its charm upon  
 Her mouth, I would not even like her smile. 3260  
 I have seen sweeter, wasted on mere whims  
 And useless trifles, scorn and flattery,  
 Flirtation – and did those enchant me too?  
 Did they too conjure up the wish in me  
 To flutter all my life away in their 3265  
 Sunshine? Oh no. And yet I'm angry with  
 The man who, single-handed, made her what  
 She is. But why? Perhaps I merited  
 The scorn with which I was dismissed by Saladin.  
 It's bad enough that Saladin should think so. 3270  
 How small I must have seemed to him! And how  
 Contemptible! And all this for a girl? –  
 Curd! Curd! This cannot be. Control yourself!  
 Suppose that Daja was just chattering  
 About a thing that would be difficult 3275  
 To prove? At last! He's coming from his house.



He's deep in conversation. But with whom?  
With him, with my Lay Brother? Ah! so now  
He must know everything! Perhaps he is  
Betrayed already to the Patriarch. 3280  
Oh what a fool I've been to cause all this,  
To think that just a single spark of passion  
Can set all our brain on fire! Now quickly  
Make your mind up: What are you to do?  
I'll wait here for them, to one side – perhaps 3285  
The Brother will be leaving before long.

#### Scene 4

Nathan and the Lay Brother

NATHAN           *(as they approach)*  
Once again, good brother, many thanks.

LAY BROTHER   My thanks to you as well!

NATHAN                           Your thanks for what?  
Because I obstinately pressed on you  
Something you don't need? If only you 3290  
Had given in. But you refused to be  
A richer man than I am.

LAY BROTHER                   Anyway,  
The book does not belong to me. It is  
The daughter's property. In fact  
The one and only legacy she has 3295  
From her own father – though she does have you.  
God grant you never may have reason  
To regret all you have done for her.

NATHAN                           How could I?  
Never! Have no fear of that.

LAY BROTHER                   And yet,  
With all these Patriarchs and Templar Knights ... 3300

NATHAN           No harm that they could ever do to me  
Would make me feel regret for anything  
I've done, and certainly not this.  
And are you sure it really is a Templar  
Who's stirring up your Patriarch?

LAY BROTHER                   It couldn't 3305  
Have been anybody else. A Templar  
Had just been talking to him; what I heard  
Confirmed it.

NATHAN                           But at present there is only  
One of them in all Jerusalem.



I know him, and he is a friend of mine, 3310  
A noble and sincere young man!

LAY BROTHER That's right,  
The very one! Yet what one is and what  
One must be in this world – the two things don't always  
Fit exactly.

NATHAN Sadly not; and so  
Whoever it may be, just let him do 3315  
His worst or best! Now, Brother, with your book  
I shall defy them all, and take it straight  
To Saladin.

LAY BROTHER Good luck! I'll leave you now.

NATHAN You haven't even seen her? Come back soon,  
And come as often as you can. I hope 3320  
The Patriarch learns nothing more today.  
But why not? Tell him if you like.

LAY BROTHER I shan't.  
Farewell! (*Exit*)

NATHAN But don't forget us, Brother – God!  
If only I could sink upon my knees  
Right here, under the vault of heaven. How 3325  
The tangled web, which caused me such anxiety,  
Unravels of its own accord! – Oh God,  
How light I feel now that there's nothing that  
I need to hide, and now that I can walk  
Before humanity as freely as 3330  
Before your sight. You are the only one  
Who does not judge us human beings by  
Our deeds, which rarely are our deeds, Oh God.

### Scene 5

Nathan and the Templar

*The Templar comes up to Nathan from the side*

TEMPLAR Hey, Nathan, wait! Take me with you.

NATHAN Who's that?  
Oh, there you are! Where did you go? I was 3335  
Expecting you to meet me at the Sultan's.

TEMPLAR We missed each other. Don't be angry.

NATHAN I am  
Not. But Saladin ...

TEMPLAR You had just left.



TEMLAR Denounced  
You? That is – with all due respect to him –







NATHAN      If this is what you take me for ...

TEMPLAR In short,

I went to see the Patriarch – I did 3405

Not name you, though – that is a lie, as I

Have said. I simply told him of the case

In general terms, and asked for his opinion –

Of course I should have left it all unsaid. 3410

I knew already that the Patriarch

Was villainous. Why couldn't I have talked

To you at once? Why did I have to let

The poor girl run the risk of losing such

A father? But what does it matter now?

That villain of a Patriarch, who always 3415

Will remain just as he is, has quickly

Brought me to my senses. Listen, Nathan,

Listen to me – let us just suppose

That he already knows your name. What more 3420

Can he do? He can only take the girl

If she belongs to you and no one else.

And only from *your* house can he remove

Her to the cloister – so, give her to me!

Give her to me, and let him come! He surely

Would not dare to take my wife away. 3425

Just give her to me; quickly! I don't care

If she's your daughter, or she's not! And I

## Don't care if she's a Christian or a Jew

Or if she's neither. I don't care! It's all 3430

The same. And all my life I'll ask you nothing

More about it. What will be, will be!

NATHAN        I have such need to hide the truth? You really  
                      Think so?

TEMPLAR                      What will be, will be!

NATHAN But I

Have never yet concealed from you – or anyone

Who ought to know – that she's a Christian, and 3435

That she is no more than my foster daughter.

But why, you ask, have I not told her yet?

For that I need apologize to none

But her.

TEMPLAR But you don't even have to do that.

May she never have to look on you

With different eyes. Spare her the revelation.

You and you alone, are still responsible

For her. Give her to me! I beg



You, Nathan, just give her to me! I am  
The only one who, for the second time,  
Can save her for you – and I will. 3445

NATHAN I could  
Have done so, but not now. It is too late  
For that.

TEMPLAR Too late?

NATHAN Thanks to the Patriarch.

TEMPLAR The Patriarch? Thanks? Thanks to him? For what? 3450  
He is the one who ought to give us thanks.  
So why thank him?

NATHAN Because we know to whom  
She is related, and we know into  
Whose hands she now can safely be entrusted.

TEMPLAR Thank him? Let the devil thank him! 3455

NATHAN And now you must receive her from those hands,  
And not from mine.

TEMPLAR Poor Recha! How you are  
Pursued by fate, poor Recha! What for any  
Other orphan would be great good fortune  
Is disaster for you. Nathan, where 3460  
Are these relations?

NATHAN Where?

TEMPLAR And who are they?

NATHAN They've found a brother in particular,  
And you must ask him for her hand.

TEMPLAR A brother?  
What is he, this brother? He's a soldier?  
Or a priest? – Just tell me what I can  
Expect ....

NATHAN I think that he is neither, or 3465  
Perhaps he may be both. I don't know much  
About him yet.

TEMPLAR What else?

NATHAN A fine young man.  
With whom our Recha may perhaps do well.

TEMPLAR And yet he is a Christian. Sometimes, Nathan, 3470  
I just don't know what to think of you.  
I don't mean to offend you, but when she's with



Christians, won't she have to play the Christian?  
If she plays it long enough, she'll end  
Up really being one, and then the pure  
Corn which you sowed will finally be choked 3475  
By weeds. And does that worry you so little?  
Can you really say, in spite of that,  
That with her brother, Recha may perhaps  
Do well?

NATHAN                                I think so, and I hope so. And 3480  
If she lacks anything from him, can she  
Not always turn to you and me?

TEMPLAR                                Oh, can  
She possibly lack anything from him?  
The little brother will provide his little  
Sister with a rich supply of food  
And clothing, sweets and finery. What else 3485  
Could such a little sister need? Of course,  
A husband! – Well, the little brother, in  
His own good time, will certainly provide  
Him too; he only has to find him, and 3490  
The more Christian the better! Nathan, Nathan!  
What an angel you created, just  
For others to destroy your work for you.

NATHAN                                You need not fear that. He will prove to be  
Most worthy of our love.

TEMPLAR                                Don't say that! Never  
Say that of *my* love! For it will not 3495  
Be cheated of the slightest thing, however small,  
Not even of a name. But tell me, does  
She yet have reason to suspect what has  
Been happening to her?

NATHAN                                Perhaps, I don't 3500  
Yet know. Why do you ask me?

TEMPLAR                                Just because  
I have to be the one to tell her what  
Fate threatens her, in either case. I thought  
That I would never see or speak to her  
Again, until I was allowed to call her  
Mine. But all is changed. I'll hurry. 3505

NATHAN                                Where?  
Come back!

TEMPLAR                                To her. To see if, in her soul  
This girl is man enough to make the one  
Decision which is worthy of her.







- RECHA                                Well, I find books most difficult  
To read.
- SITTAH                                You're serious?
- RECHA                                Quite serious.  
My father has no love of cold book-learning  
Which imprints itself upon the brain                                3535  
With lifeless symbols.
- SITTAH                                How extraordinary!  
But maybe there's some truth in it. So, much  
Of what you know ...
- RECHA                                I know only from his  
Own teaching. And for most of it I still  
Could tell you how and when and why he taught it                                3540  
To me.
- SITTAH                                Maybe everything makes better  
Sense like this, because the whole soul learns  
At once.
- RECHA                                I'm sure that Sittah has read very  
Little.
- SITTAH                                The contrary, though I'm not proud of it.  
Why do you say that? Tell me frankly, why?                                3545
- RECHA                                You are so simple and direct; so natural,  
Like no one but yourself.
- SITTAH                                And what of that?
- RECHA                                My father says that people who read books  
Are seldom like that.
- SITTAH                                What a splendid man  
Your father is!
- RECHA                                He is.
- SITTAH                                How near the mark                                3550  
He always hits.
- RECHA                                He does. And yet my father ...
- SITTAH                                What's the matter, Recha dear?
- RECHA                                My father –
- SITTAH                                God! Why are you crying?
- RECHA                                Oh, my father –  
I must tell you, or my heart will burst ...  
(*overcome by weeping she falls at her feet*)







SITTAH But what about? Why? How?

RECHA            Ah, the poor woman, as I told you, is  
A Christian, so her love made her torment me.  
She is one of those fanatics who  
Imagine that they know the only true  
And universal way to God.

3585

SITTAH Yes, now  
I understand.

RECHA

They have to lead all those 3590  
Who missed the one true way, and guide them to  
It. They have little choice. For if it's true  
That only this way leads them in  
The right direction, then how could they calmly  
Watch their friends pursue another path 3595  
Which leads them to damnation, eternal  
Damnation. Surely one could love and hate  
A single person simultaneously.  
But it's not that which in the end compels  
Me to complain about her. All her sighs 3600  
And warnings, all her prayers and all her threats,  
I would have tolerated longer – yes.  
They always prompted good and useful thoughts.  
And surely it is deeply flattering  
To us to feel that any fellow-creature 3605  
Loves and values us so much as to  
Be tortured by the thought of losing us  
For all eternity.

SITTAH *Alhamdulillah* That's true!

RECHA

And yet –

I have no weapon against this, not patience,  
Not reflection, nothing!

SITTAH Against what? 3610

RECHA      What she claims to have revealed to me  
Just now.

SITTAH      Revealed? Just now?

RECHA Just now. When we  
Were coming here, as we approached a ruined  
Christian temple, suddenly she stopped.  
She stood, and seemed to struggle with herself. 3615  
With tear-filled eyes she looked up at the heavens,  
Then at me. At last she said, 'Come, let us  
Take the shortest path, right through this temple.'



She led on, I followed her, and I  
 Looked round with horror at the crumbling ruins. 3620  
 Then she stopped again. I saw that we were  
 On the sunken steps before a ruined  
 Altar. Imagine how I felt when, weeping  
 Scalding tears, she flung herself down at  
 My feet, and wrung her hands.

SITTAH My dearest child! 3625

RECHA And by the divinity<sup>78</sup> who has received  
 So many prayers there and, they say, has worked  
 So many miracles, she pleaded with me;  
 With a look of true compassion she  
 Implored me to have mercy on myself. 3630  
 Or at least to pardon her if she  
 Now told me of her church's claim on me.

SITTAH (Unhappy child! – I feared as much.)

RECHA She said  
 I was of Christian blood; I was baptised;  
 I was not Nathan's daughter; he was not 3635  
 My father. God! God! He is not my father!  
 Sittah! Sittah! I prostrate myself  
 Before you.

SITTAH Recha, no! Get up. – My brother's here.

### Scene 7

Saladin and the preceding

SALADIN What's happened, Sittah?

SITTAH She's distraught! – Oh God! 3640

SALADIN Who is it?

SITTAH But you know ....

SALADIN Our Nathan's daughter?  
 What is wrong?

SITTAH Compose yourself, my child.  
 The Sultan ...

RECHA (*drags herself on her knees to Saladin's feet,  
 and bows her head to the ground*)

I shall not stand up! And I  
 Shall never look upon the Sultan's face,  
 And never more admire the image of 3645

<sup>78</sup> The Virgin Mary.



Eternal justice and of goodness in  
His eyes, and on his brow ...

SALADIN Stand up, stand up!

RECHA Until he promises ...

SALADIN I promise it,  
Whatever it may be!

RECHA No more, no less  
Than this: to let me keep my father, and 3650  
Let him keep me. – I still don't know who else  
Demands to be my father, or who has  
The right. And I don't want to know. Does blood  
Alone create a father?

SALADIN (*raising her up*) Yes, I understand!  
Who was so cruel as to put such thoughts 3655  
Into your head? But has this matter been  
Completely settled? Proved beyond all doubt?

RECHA It must have been. For Daja claims to have it  
From my nurse.

SALADIN Your nurse!

RECHA She felt, as she  
Was dying, that she must confide in her. 3660

SALADIN As she was dying – and perhaps delirious?  
But what if it were true? No: blood, and blood  
Alone, can never make a father! Hardly  
Even father of a beast. It gives  
At most a prior right to claim that name. 3665  
So don't let yourself get anxious. And  
Do you know what? As soon as these two fathers  
Quarrel over you – leave both of them  
And take a third. Accept me as your father!

SITTAH Yes! Oh do!

SALADIN I'll be a good father. 3670  
A really good father. But wait! An even  
Better thought occurs to me. Why do you  
Need a father anyway? What when he dies?  
You need to look around for someone who  
Will match you in the race of life. Do you 3675  
Not know someone?

SITTAH Don't make her blush!

SALADIN That is  
Exactly what I meant to do to her.



If blushing makes the ugly beautiful,  
 It's bound to make the lovely even lovelier.  
 I've asked your father, Nathan, and – another 3680  
 Man to join us here. Can you guess who  
 That is? I've asked him here – with your permission,  
 Sittah ...

SITTAH Brother!

SALADIN Now be sure you really  
 Blush before him, dearest girl.

RECHA Why should  
 I blush? For whom?

SALADIN You little hypocrite! 3685  
 Turn pale, then, if you like. – Just as you please,  
 And as you can. –  
 (*A slave girl comes in and goes up to Sittah*)

SALADIN Have they arrived already?

SITTAH (*to the slave*)  
 Good. Just show them in. – Brother, they're here!

### *Last Scene*

Nathan and the Templar join the others

SALADIN My dear, good friends! – and first of all, dear Nathan  
 I must tell you that you now can ask 3690  
 For all the money which you lent to be  
 Repaid, as quickly as you like.

NATHAN Sultan!

SALADIN I am at *your* service now.

NATHAN Sultan!

SALADIN The caravan has come. And now at last  
 I'm richer than I've been for many years. 3695  
 Come, tell me what you need to undertake  
 Some mighty enterprise! For even merchants  
 Like yourself can never have enough  
 Of ready cash!

NATHAN Why do you mention first  
 So insignificant a trifle? For I see  
 Someone in tears. It matters more to me  
 That I should dry them. (*Goes up to Recha*)  
 You've been crying? What's  
 The matter? Are you not my daughter still?



RECHA My father!

NATHAN                      That's enough, we understand  
Each other. Now be calm, be cheerful – if  
Your heart is still your own, and if your heart  
Is threatened by no other loss. – Your father  
Is not lost.

RECHA I fear no other loss.

TEMPLAR      No other? Then, I have deceived myself.  
What we are not afraid to lose, we never  
Thought that we possessed, and never even  
Wanted. Very well! In that case, Nathan,  
All is changed. We came here, Saladin,  
At your command. But I regret that I  
Misled you; give yourself no further trouble!

SALADIN      Must you be so rash again, young man?  
Must everything come back to you, defer  
To you?

TEMPLAR But Saladin, you heard and saw?

SALADIN      Yes. And it's a pity you were not  
More certain of your case.

TEMPLAR I am now. 3720

SALADIN

Anyone who boasts of a good deed  
Cancels it right out. What you have saved is not  
Your property. If that were so, a robber  
Driven by his greed into a fire  
Would be as good a hero as yourself. 3725  
*(Going up to Recha, to lead her to the Templar)*  
Come, dear girl. Don't be too hard on him.  
If he were different, less proud and less  
Impulsive, he would not have tried to save you.  
You must weigh the one against the other.  
And now, put him to shame! Do what he should 3730  
Have done. Confess your love. Propose to him!  
If he refuses you, or if he should  
Forget that you have done much more for him,  
By taking such a step, than he has done  
For you – what did he do for you? He got 3735  
Himself a little smoke-stained? How impressive!  
Such a man has nothing of my brother,  
Assad. He may wear his mask, but not  
His heart. So come, my dear ...



- SITTAH Yes, go, my dear!  
That is the least that you can do to show 3740  
Your gratitude.
- NATHAN Wait, Saladin! Wait, Sittah!
- SALADIN You as well?
- NATHAN There's someone else who has  
To speak.
- SALADIN But Nathan, who denies that such  
A foster father has a right to speak?  
Perhaps a better right than others. I 3745  
Know all about the situation.
- NATHAN Not quite all! –  
I wasn't speaking of myself, but of  
Another, someone else entirely who  
Must be consulted, Saladin.
- SALADIN But who?
- NATHAN Her brother.
- SALADIN Recha's brother?
- NATHAN Yes.
- RECHA My brother? 3750  
So I have a brother?
- TEMPLAR *(starting out of his wild, silent abstraction)*  
Where? Where is  
This brother? Not here yet? I was supposed  
To meet him here.
- NATHAN Yes, just be patient.
- TEMPLAR *(very bitterly)*  
He has  
Imposed a father on her, – so he can  
Supply a brother, can't he?
- SALADIN That's too much! 3755  
Christian! Such a mean suspicion never  
Would have passed my Assad's lips. All right –  
Just carry on.
- NATHAN Forgive him, Sultan!  
– I forgive him gladly. At his age,  
And in his place, who knows what we would think? 3760  
*(going up to him in a friendly way)*  
Yes, knight, I understand. Mistrust begets  
Suspicion. If you'd only trusted me  
With your real name ...



TEMLAR                                   What?

NATHAN                                  You are not a Stauffen.

TEMLAR         Who am I?

NATHAN                              Your name's not Curd von Stauffen.

TEMLAR         What is it?

NATHAN                              You're Leu von Filnek.

TEMLAR                                  What?                                 3765

NATHAN         You're startled?

TEMLAR                              Rightly so. Who says this?

NATHAN   I do;  
I could tell you more, much more. But I  
Am not accusing you of lying.

TEMLAR                                  No?

NATHAN         Perhaps the other name is also yours.

TEMLAR         I should hope so! – (Just as well you said that!)                         3770

NATHAN         Yes, your mother was a Stauffen. And  
Her brother – that's your uncle – brought you up.  
Your parents left you with him when the harshness  
Of the German climate drove them out,  
And they returned here to this country. Now,   3775  
Your uncle's name was Curd von Stauffen; and  
Perhaps he did adopt you as a child.  
Was it with him that you also came here,  
So long ago? And is he still alive?

TEMLAR         What can I say to you? Of course, it's true.                                 3780  
My uncle died. I only came here with  
The latest reinforcement of our Order,  
But – what has all this to do with Recha's  
Brother?

NATHAN                              Now, your father ...

TEMLAR                                  What? You knew  
Him too?

NATHAN                              Your father was my friend.

TEMLAR                                  Your friend?                                 3785  
Can it be possible?

NATHAN   And he was known  
As Wolf von Filnek; though he was not German.



- TEMPLAR      You know this too?
- NATHAN                                      But he was married  
To a German – that's your mother – and  
He followed her to Germany, though not                                      3790  
For long.
- TEMPLAR                                      Enough! The brother – who is Recha's  
Brother?
- NATHAN                                      You are.
- TEMPLAR                                      I? Her brother?
- RECHA    He's my brother?
- SITTAH                      Brother and sister!
- SALADIN    Is it possible?
- RECHA                      (*going to him*)  
My brother!
- TEMPLAR                      (*steps back*) Brother?
- RECHA                      (*stops and turns to Nathan*) No, it can't be true.  
His heart denies it! – We're deceivers, God!                                      3795
- SALADIN                      (*to the Templar*)  
Deceivers, Templar? Is that what you think?  
But you are the deceiver! Everything  
About you – face and voice and bearing – is  
A lie. You will not recognise your sister?  
Go!
- TEMPLAR                      (*going humbly to him*)  
Sultan, don't misinterpret my                                      3800  
Astonishment. You hardly could have seen  
Assad at such a moment; don't misjudge  
Both him and me. (*going to Nathan*)  
You rob me and enrich me,  
Nathan; both in fullest measure. But  
You give me far, far more than you have taken.                                      3805  
(*Embracing Recha*)  
Oh my sister, my dear sister!
- NATHAN    Blanda  
Von Filnek.
- TEMPLAR    Blanda? Blanda? – And not Recha?  
Not your Recha any more? – You are  
Rejecting her, by giving back her Christian  
Name? Reject her if you must, but Nathan,                                      3810  
Why do you make Recha suffer so?



- NATHAN        Nonsense! Children! You are both my children!  
For my daughter's brother is my son –  
If he is willing.  
*(Leaving them to embrace each other Saladin goes in uneasy astonishment to his sister)*
- SALADIN        Sister, tell me what  
You think.
- SITTAH         I'm moved.
- SALADIN        I too – I almost shudder at        3815  
The thought of something still more moving. So  
Prepare yourself, as best you can.
- SITTAH         What do  
You mean?
- SALADIN        Nathan, a word with you ...  
*(While Nathan goes to him, Sittah goes up to the brother and sister to express her sympathy and Nathan and Saladin talk quietly.)*  
Now listen,  
Nathan: did you not just tell us ...
- NATHAN         What?
- SALADIN        You told us that their father did not come        3820  
From Germany, and was not born a German.  
So what was he, and where did he come from?
- NATHAN        He didn't choose to talk to me about it.  
I know nothing that I heard from him.
- SALADIN        But he was not a Frank? A Westerner?        3825
- NATHAN        No, he was not. He made no secret of it.  
He preferred to speak in Persian.
- SALADIN        He spoke Persian?  
What more do I want? It must be him!
- NATHAN        It must be who?
- SALADIN        My brother! Assad! There  
Can be no doubt!
- NATHAN        Now that you've worked it out,        3830  
You'll find full confirmation in this book.  
*(handing him the breviary)*
- SALADIN        *(opening it eagerly)*  
His writing! Yes I recognize that too!
- NATHAN        They don't know anything about this. It's  
Entirely up to you how much they learn.



- SALADIN *(leafing through the book)*  
Should I not recognise my brother's children? 3835  
My nephew and my niece – my children? Not  
Acknowledge them? And should I let you keep them?  
*(aloud again)*  
Sittah! I was right! They are, they really  
Are! They are our brother's children!  
*(Runs to embrace them)*
- SITTAH *(following him)*  
What!  
But then, how could it have been otherwise? 3840
- SALADIN *(to the Templar)*  
Now, stubborn man, you will be forced to love me!  
*(to Recha)*  
And Recha, I shall be what I offered  
Whether or not you want it!
- SITTAH So shall I.
- SALADIN *(to the Templar again)*  
My son! My Assad! My own Assad's son!
- TEMPLAR So I am of your blood? – And so those dreams 3845  
Which rocked me in my cradle, after all  
Were more than dreams! *(falling at his feet)*
- SALADIN *(raising him up)*  
Just listen to the rascal!  
He suspected something, but he did  
His best to make me murder him! You wait!  
*(Silently they all embrace each other again and the curtain falls.)*

THE END